

## BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: James Akinobu Nakano

James Akinobu Nakano, seventh of eight children, was born in 1933, in Honolulu, O'ahu, Hawai'i. His parents, Minoru and Sugano Nakano were immigrants from Fukuoka-ken, Japan.

His father, Minoru Nakano, was a general contractor. He also owned rental homes and commercial property.

Prominent in the community, Minoru Nakano entertained many at the large home that housed his parents, his wife, and children.

Prior to World War II, some members of the Nakano family took trips to Japan. In December 1941, Minoru Nakano's parents, two sons, and two daughters were living in Japan.

In February 1942, Minoru Nakano was removed from his home by FBI agents. Initially incarcerated at the Sand Island Detention Center on O'ahu, he was later sent to various facilities on the U.S. Mainland.

By early 1943, the Nakano family in Hawai'i—Sugano Nakano and three sons—was incarcerated, too. They were placed in Jerome War Relocation Center in Arkansas. As the center closed in 1944, Minoru Nakano joined his family. Having expressed a desire to return to Japan, Minoru Nakano and family were assigned to Tule Lake Segregation Center.

At war's end, a daughter was born at Tule Lake to Minoru and Sugano Nakano. By that time, Minoru Nakano and son, Jitsuo, were not in camp. While both were to go to Japan, Minoru Nakano decided to return to Hawai'i.

In the postwar, various family members, including James Nakano, were returned to the islands. Minoru Nakano resumed contracting—tearing down army barracks and building homes with the salvaged barrack lumber.

James Nakano, completing his education in the islands, Illinois, and California, became an attorney. He practiced law in California and Hawai'i.

Retired now for several years, James Nakano resides in Hawai'i. He has two daughters.

Tape No. 57-20-1-12

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

James Akinobu Nakano (JN)

Honolulu, Hawai'i

October 25, 2012

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN) and Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

WN: This is an interview with Mr. James Akinobu Nakano on October 25, 2012, and interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and Michi Kodama-Nishimoto and we're on the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa campus.

So, good afternoon, Jim.

JN: Good afternoon, Warren.

WN: Okay, we'd like to start by asking you an easy question. Can you tell us when you were born and where you were born? What year were you born?

JN: Nineteen thirty-three. I was born in Wai'ālae [on O'ahu]. No, wait a minute. I was born in Farmers Road, in those days. There was little more in the farm area. Then I think as my dad got wealthier, he moved back. He moved into Wai'ālae, I think.

WN: Okay. Well, let's see, we'll ask you about Wai'ālae in a minute, but we wanted to ask you first about your father's family background. Minoru Nakano, [JN's father] can you tell us about his background and his parents and so forth?

JN: Okay. What I do know is that the whole family, our whole ancestors, came from Fukuoka, Japan. My grandfather was the first to come to Hawai'i. My understanding is that my grandfather—I'm not sure if he. . . . He probably came with the group that was hired for the plantation. And the stories I hear, my grandfather was not the normal Japanese old man. He got into all kinds of trouble in my understanding. What I hear about him is that he had some kind of problems in Fukuoka and he had to leave. Going into the plantations in Hawai'i, I guess, was the best way of him leaving and getting out of Japan.

My understanding is he went to the Big Island [Hawai'i Island] first, I'm not sure where, by himself. Again, these are rumors I hear, all unconfirmed, is that he had a Hawaiian woman as his girlfriend or wife while he lived there. I never was able to check it out, but I understand there was a daughter born of that relationship. This is again on the Big Island. Then what I heard also is he was on the plantation and for whatever reason, he took off from the plantation. He apparently didn't want to work (horn sound), so he took off and ran away or whatever it is. Then I hear my grandfather was relatively big for a Japanese and he was husky, too. My understanding was he was hired as a bodyguard to those gambling when the plantation workers go to gamble, and they needed somebody as a bodyguard to make sure nobody stole from anybody else. That, I understand, was what he was doing. But as I said, these are all unconfirmed rumors about my grandfather.

WN: When you say these stories, who told you these stories?

JN: I can't pinpoint any one person. It's almost like a family story that kind of floats around and you're picking up bits and pieces. So as I said, it's obviously unconfirmed stories. But if it was stories to make him look good, then I would think I can understand some of the family members might make it up. But this isn't anything to brag about, right?

(Laughter)

WN: Well, it sounds like he was a very independent man.

JN: Oh, there is another thing. I'm sure my kids would want to know this. I understand that my grandfather who then had a truck, never worked, but I think my father bought him a truck. He hit somebody and killed somebody. Then they said they found him up in Makapu'u somewhere ready to jump off the cliff. They pulled him and I think he spent jail time for that accident. The story I hear and I'm pretty sure it's true because I have images him of visiting him in prison. I don't know why. I don't know if they permitted young kids to visit their grandparents. But the story I hear is—I can't remember the name of the senator. I think he was a lawyer.

WN: Where was he from?

JN: O'ahu. A well-known name.

MK: Was it William Heen?

JN: No. Japanese name. Oh, I can't remember. I don't have it here, but I have a picture of him attending my brother's wedding. And he's there. The name just slips out. But anyway, my father hired him and ultimately got my grandfather out of prison.

MK: Could it have been Tsukiyama?

JN: Tsukiyama.

WN: Tsukiyama? Wilfred?

JN: Wilfred Tsukiyama.

WN: Oh, he became chief justice of the [Hawai'i State] Supreme Court eventually.

JN: Right. So he was instrumental, in my understanding. And my understanding, my father was leaning on him, I think, to help my grandfather.

MK: And for the record, your grandfather's name was Yoichi Nakano?

JN: Yes. Then after, why and under what circumstances the rest of the family came, I'm not sure. But then my grandmother [Tomoyo Nakano] and my mother [Sugano Nakano] and I guess her sister—maybe the whole family came. I'm really not sure.

WN: Oh, you're talking about—this is your paternal side still? Are we still talking about Yoichi? Yoichi was your grandfather.

JN: That's right. I'm sorry. That's right. I got it mixed up. Then my father, who was the son of my grandfather, my father then came with his mother.

WN: Tomoyo?

JN: Tomoyo. Then also his brother. So I guess the three or four of them came.

WN: Okay. So I have here that your father came to Hawai'i with his mother and a sibling in 1910.

JN: Could be. That's about when they were here or 1900 or so. I'm not sure how he became a carpenter and how he became a general contractor. That part ...

WN: This is your father?

JN: Yes. Because my uncle, his younger brother, also became a general contractor. So where that came from, I'm not sure. It certainly wasn't from my (chuckles) grandfather.

MK: When it comes to like your father's educational background or training, what do you know about that?

JN: I seem to remember people saying that my dad had, in Japanese education, third grade. No English education as such. So why we all went to college, I have no idea.

(Laughter)

Because he showed no great respect for education. He never talked anything about, "Oh, you guys got to get educated" kind of thing. I think he felt he's self-made and that's good enough and you don't need an education actually. For him, I think it was materialistically how much money you can make and that was his sense of success basically. My father was a playboy in many ways because I remember us going—he was at teahouses. In those days, I think the general contractors in the Japanese American communities were the moneymakers in the community. What's that one name, Tanaka? J.M. Tanaka?

MK: Mm-hmm [yes].

JN: It's in that group of contractors. My recollection, when I was young, driving over to pick up my father at teahouses basically. This is so typical of him is that the three brothers would come in and were teenagers. We drive the car over to pick him up. He runs down—and he's gambling—so he runs down and he pays us off, money. And he says, "Be quiet and wait here," and he runs back up and continues gambling. Then he comes down and we drive him home. But this was, to me, typical of what he was. I even recollect one incident at this white house that I showed you guys, in Wai'alae. I'm looking out the window and he's coming home drunk and he's got a geisha girl that he wants to bring into the house with my mother at home. (Chuckles) Obviously, he was a character.

(Laughter)

JN: I was the opposite. I took after my mother basically. She was very restrained.

WN: So when your father came to Hawai'i, do you know where they lived first?

JN: No. Somewhere along the line, I think they lived in Mō'ili'ili. I remember my uncle, his younger brother, living there, too, because I remember going there.

WN: Okay. Eventually they moved to Wai'alae?

JN: Yes. Why we went to Wai'alae—as I said, he developed that Wai'alae area. He developed where he built the house, where we lived, the big white house. Then he built I think like a village. He was a chief, village chief. He had all these rentals. I would say, five or six rentals, housing rentals. Plus, on Wai'alae Avenue itself, he had about three or four commercial rentals. There was a bakery, barbershop, a grocery store in the front.

MK: Was there a name for the area or a name associated with that area?

JN: 'Ō'ili Road.

WN: Can you tell us around what's there now? I mean, where are we talking about, in terms of 'Ō'ili Road?

JN: The closest thing would be the shopping center.

WN: Kāhala Mall.

JN: Kāhala Mall. My house was somewhere in that Kāhala Mall. I'm not sure where exactly.

WN: I see. The big white house you folks lived in was standing where Kāhala Mall is today, somewhere.

JN: All around, in addition to the houses—my dad built those houses—the rest of the area was basically pig farmers. So all my friends were basically kids who worked on the pig farms. The thing I remember with a great deal of fondness is that the guy Mike, guy our age, would be driving the truck to pick up slop to feed the pigs and we would go with him for the ride. That was our greatest thrill. We would be on the truck and we'd go to town and we'd go to restaurants and we're picking up all the slops. Then we take it to his house and there's this big whatever it is that they have food in there. He'd dump all this food in there and they'd cook it and they feed the pigs. I don't know why that sticks really close in my mind.

Then after that, he has the truck, finish, he cleans up, and we all get on there. We don't have a car, right? He's the only guy with a car or a truck. So we get on the car and we drive to Makapu'u and we go swimming.

(Laughter)

I still remember Makapu'u back in those days.

WN: Was this friend Okinawan by any chance?

JN: Yeah. As a matter of fact, he was. Most of the guys were Okinawans in that area, I think, in the pig farms.

WN: Now, when I first asked you when and where you were born, you mentioned Farmers Road. Do you know the circumstances of why you folks were at Farmers Road?

JN: Well, I'm not sure, but in addition to Wai'alae, my dad bought some land or leased land in what we call Farmers Road area. Oh, I think he had that for my grandparents to live on so that they could grow flowers and whatever they wanted to grow. Then when the [Great] Depression hit, somehow I get the impression that we all went to Farmers Road because for some reason, we couldn't afford Wai'alae. I'm not quite sure how that worked out. But then after the depression—and I think I was born then on Farmers Road.

WN: Nineteen thirty-three, yeah.

JN: Then as the depression got better, we moved back to Wai'alae and 'Ō'ili Road.

WN: I see. Which isn't that far.

JN: No.

WN: Kind of close.

JN: Yeah, it was. So I'm not quite sure what the circumstances were.

MK: In contrast to other nisei, you had grandparents here in the Islands. I was wondering what recollections do you have of your Grandfather Nakano and Grandmother Nakano?

JN: The image I have, as I said before, of my grandfather was he was stoic, didn't say too many things. Hardly spoke. Smoked a cigarette that he wrapped himself. Spit a lot. But I also remember him—and he didn't work so he must have gotten the money from my dad—but he bought me my first tricycle, bicycle, and whatever. My guess is because I was the youngest and my guess is my dad was making more money when I came of that age. So I was getting tricycles and bicycles and all these goodies from my grandfather who never worked. So he got it from my (chuckles) father.

My grandmother was like a floating social bug. She's always going around talking and smiling with people and not doing anything. Not helping my mother. Seems like my mother had to support the whole family insofar as the work was concerned because my grandmother, I think, felt she was above doing work and so she wouldn't do any work or help around. But she was like a social bug and everybody liked her and she was very likable and everything else. Obviously, I liked her because she was very nice to me, too.

WN: She spoke more than your grandfather did, obviously.

JN: Oh, yeah. She spoke a lot, I think. I can kind of hear her still, her voice kinda ringing in my ear. My grandfather never said—that's a strange relationship. I don't know how . . .

(Laughter)

JN: That's weird. I don't know how that ever came about. It just didn't match.

MK: Then for your mother's side of the family, we haven't heard too much about your mother, Sugano Nakano. Tell us about what you know about her from the time she was in Japan.

JN: I know very little about her. Again, she hardly spoke. She was my mother and I stuck to her like glue, and I was the youngest, but I don't hear her voice and I don't remember her talking too much. But she must have been doing a lot of work because, as I say, my grandmother never helped. So she must have did everything—the cooking, and the cleaning, and every other [household task]. She looked like she was kind of withdrawn rather than outgoing. My father was outgoing and my mother seemed like was very inward kind of a person. Then, of course, she died.

WN: She died in 1946, yeah?

JN: Do you remember the Japanese movie about Manzanar Camp?

WN: They had a Japanese movie? The one on TV?

JN: Yeah, it was on TV.

WN: Very recently.

JN: Yeah. At the very end, they show the mother. They're finally back at their home in California. They show the mother walking like she's so happy she's back. They show her walking from the house that they lived in. She walks out and she's overlooking the farm. She collapses and dies there. My mother did the same thing. The house in Mō'ili'ili, we went to visit my uncle. We lived in Wai'alaie that time, but we went to visit my uncle. I was with them in Mō'ili'ili. I remember us walking back to the car. Then she collapsed, then died right after that so. That's why, I always—when I see that movie, you know, the Manzanar movie. It really struck a chord.

WN: She was only forty-five years old.

JN: Yeah.

WN: Very young. Right after the war experience, too. Her family was from Fukuoka as well?

JN: Yeah, but more farther in the woods somewhere, more so than Kurume. Kurume was not exactly a big city, but little more populated.

WN: Kurume is the town in Fukuoka that your father's side is from.

JN: Yeah. I'm not sure it's a village, town, or what it is, Kurume.

MK: Then what have you been told about the [maternal] grandparents?

JN: Not a lot. The only person I remember distinctly is her kid brother. He lived in Kapahulu. What I understand, though, is both my grandparents, my mother's side, went back to Japan. They came here, I don't know when, but they went back to Japan in 1930-something, or whatever it is. For whatever reason, I'm not quite sure. But I remember the house in Kapahulu for some reason. They went back and I've very little memory of them.

MK: You mentioned that your mother had her last child, your sister Joyce Akemi, while in camp and when she came back, your mother passed away, yeah?

JN: My kid sister was born just about the day the war ended. Either the day before or the day after the war ended in August 15th or 16th.

MK: I was wondering, how many children were there in the Nakano family?

JN: Total of eight. There were eight. With my kid sister, it was eight.

MK: If you could tell us their names in the order of their birth.

JN: Starting with the oldest would be my sister Tomiko, next would be my sister Sumiko, and then it's my brother would be the third, Jitsuo, then it's Bert Toshitaka, then William, Henry, James. Whoever picked our names picked that. So William Akio, Henry Yoshiro, and where they got my name I don't know, but it's James Akinobu. Maybe they copied Akihito, because he was going to be born about a month after I was born.

WN: Maybe.

JN: Could be because why would they—it's from Akio, Yoshiro, and Akinobu. Kind of didn't fit. I don't know who or where these names came from. I don't know who. Because as I said, my father was not educated so I'm sure he had a problem with names and everything.

MK: How about your mother then, in terms of education or knowledge?

JN: I think my mother had the minimal education in Japan. I think in those days it was eighth grade. My father was third. I'm sure he didn't want to go to school anymore. But she was so quiet that I don't know if she understood anything or I don't know whether she read anything. But she did everything.

MK: In those days, was your family subscribing to a Japanese-language newspaper?

JN: I think so, but I don't know who was reading it. (Chuckles) I don't remember for sure. But gee that's something I never thought of. Seems like there was a newspaper around, but whether it was an American paper or not, I don't recall.

WN: So, you're number seven.

JN: Yes.

WN: So you said Tomiko, Sumiko, Jitsuo, Bert, William, Henry, yourself James, and there was one more later, right?

JN: Twelve years later.

WN: Twelve years later in Tule Lake?

JN: Tule Lake. Joyce Akemi.

WN: Joyce Akemi, okay.

MK: Then earlier in the conversation we were talking about the big white house that you folks grew up in, yeah?

JN: Yes.

MK: Describe for us that big white house.

JN: Well, it was a big white house, but there were ten or eleven of us living there. So if you look at the house, facing the house directly, on the left side there a big veranda where my grandfather was. Then you walk into the front door, on the left side, was where the main bedroom was where my father and my mother stayed. I also grew up there. I think others did, too. I think then there was this bathroom with a big *furo*. A shower and a big *furo* is what I remember. There's a telephone somewhere right near there. There's a bedroom for my two sisters. There's another bedroom down for my grandparents. Right in the middle is the living room. It's a big living room with the whole length of the building. On the top part is the kitchen. The table was right there for serving of eleven people for dinner. This last bedroom there were four boys—four or five of us—staying in that one bedroom. That'd be five when I slipped over and came from being with my parents. So it was a bit crowded. (Chuckles)

WN: When you said "big white house," was it bigger than other houses in that area?

JN: Yes. My father built all those houses in the area. So he, as I said, he was like the village chief and he had to have the biggest house. Why it was white, I'm not sure, but it was a big white house. He had rentals, about five or six rentals. There were one, two, three, four, five or six houses that he rented.

In the front, front being the Wai'alae Avenue, he had a commercial building with a bakery, a barber, and a general grocery store. It faced Wai'alae Avenue. In those days, coming down Wai'alae Avenue, it was right near where the school is now. But they had a terminal, trolley terminal. They had trolleys in those days.

There's a story. Apparently I got hit by a trolley with my head once. Just a bump. I took off. I was so scared. The bus driver tried to catch me and I took off. That's the story I heard.

MK: My goodness.

WN: Now that barber and the store and the other businesses, what was your father's involvement in these businesses? Did he just build them or was he. . . .

JN: I think he just built them.

WN: Oh, okay.

JN: I remember the names, I think. The bakery was a Togawa family. There was this Sato. She was our barber. Forgot who ran the general store.

MK: You mentioned that there were five rentals. Would you remember the names of the people living there?

JN: I can see their faces. One of them was the Yoshida, I mentioned. I can see this person and her husband had died and she had a daughter. But I can't recall the name. Wait a minute, there was a Sato. Sato ran the *saimin* stand near on Wai'alae Avenue. I remember them well because we used to go under their house every so often and play. But that's where they made their noodles. I remember the noodles being made there under that house, the Sato family. To walk from our—I'm not quite sure how it worked. These were the houses, but we walked through, I'm not sure, papaya, some kind of grove, I think, on the way over to reach the *saimin* stand. I'm sorry, the *saimin* stand is about where May Company or whatever, whoever.



- MK: Oh, Macy's?
- JN: Macy's. I think that's where the *saimin* stand was. We were further back.
- MK: When you say "*saimin*" stand, was it like a temporary stand or like a permanent structure?
- JN: It was a permanent structure. My feeling was or my understanding was, they were doing very well. Everybody liked it. Well, I remember going there and eating, too, *saimin*.
- MK: So you had the Yoshidas, you had the Satos, you folks were there.
- JN: Togawas.
- MK: Togawas.
- JN: There were others, but I can't recall their names. As I said, there was one person, I think her husband had died and she had a daughter. She was struggling trying to make ends meet. I don't recall what she did.
- WN: Of course, in those days, that area was considered country, yeah?
- JN: Yeah. Well, my backyard, I remember the plants. I'm not sure what they were growing, but I know it was a farm. They came right up to our backyard. As we walked up 'Ō'ili Road, we had lot of these people growing figs or whatever it was up in that area, up 'Ō'ili Road. Of course, there were a number of pigpens. Yeah, that's about what I recall. It was basically a farming area.
- MK: You know, all the people that rented from your father, what ethnicity were they?
- JN: All Japanese. That's why I say, I get the feeling like he was village chief. The white house was the chief's house kind of thing.
- MK: Like when you referred to him as sort of like the village chief, then what was his relationship with all these people living near you folks?
- JN: I'm not sure, but I certainly get the feeling—I'm not sure how they treated my father, but we were treated like special. Like we were the ones from the big white house, so we were treated like special. All the family members were treated that way.
- MK: In those early days during your youth, when you were a kid before the war started, I was wondering, you folks had the house. How about things like cars or trucks, you know?
- JN: Being a contractor, my dad had a bunch of trucks. I don't know how many he had, but he had a bunch. My grandfather had his own truck. It wasn't a big truck, but it was a truck. My father had, I can see it, he had a Mercury. I still remember that. He had THE car. Then my grandfather had. In addition to the house, we had a huge garage where we had parked the trucks and the cars and all. Oh, that's right, now I remember. There's another family, Horii family. Horii was downstairs, Yoshida was upstairs. I forgot the name of that person. And then Sato.
- MK: So your family had a car, the trucks were the contracting business, renters, yeah? When it came to the running of the contracting business, who was involved in it?
- JN: Well, basically, just my father. My grandfather did nothing. (Chuckles) He had no business. He didn't even talk to anybody, much less the workers. Later on as my brothers grew older, I think he wanted one of them to take over, but nobody did. Then the war came, so.
- MK: When you mention "workers," how many workers did he have?

JN: I don't remember exactly, but there were two foremen who were like his key employees. One was Hirano. I don't know why I remember that name. There's another one. Because I remember also—why they were working on Sunday, I don't remember. But December the seventh, they were both there. I remember somewhere in my memory, somebody said they heard about the war. The both of them took off. They just disappeared. In my memory, I think, "What happened? Where are they?" I'm about nine years old at that point.

MK: Wow, so your father had like foremen, there were workers ...

JN: Yeah, how many other workers he had, I know he also had one or two relatives. They were there only because they were having trouble with their family and he took them in. I guess in those days they would have, you know, family members take [them in]. So I think he brought them in and they had work for him to straighten out kind of a thing. One of them lived with us for a while because he got into trouble, then I guess my father made sure he didn't get into trouble.

MK: In that same property, what areas were there for work to be done?

JN: We also had a huge yard all the way around this white house. I know in addition, as I said, we had this garage. When I say "garage," you know, it's not enclosed. Just a top. We had a bunch of cars and trucks, including my grandfather's. So I can see my grandfather's truck there, I don't know why, and my father's Mercury. Then all the regular trucks were over there, too.

In the center, I don't think we had anything in there. But I remember, as I said, in the back there were farm areas after that from that area.

MK: Wow, that's a pretty big busy compound, you know. Rentals and contracting equipment.

JN: Yeah. I look back—and of course, I had no respect for him when I was young—I look back, gee, it's incredible what he did. It's incredible.

One strange thing that bothers me a little bit. My mother, I remember, when we were driving, my father, my mother would be telling him, "You're going too fast. Watch for this car. Watch for that car." When my mother died, I sat and I remember sitting next to him and doing the same thing my mother was doing. I don't know why. I just look back and I just wish I hadn't done that. It just bothers me that I did the same thing. But my dad would be, "Okay, all right, whatever you say." (WN and MK laugh.) He would just ignore it kind of.

WN: What was it like being a kid growing up in this area?

JN: Well, from my perspective, to be very honest, we were treated like the sons of the village chief kind of thing. But I remember playing games with the other kids in the area. We had this game where we played with a stick made out of broom handles. We would hit, hit. I'm not quite sure how we did it, but we'd hit it a certain way and it'd come down. We had two or three of 'em, it'd come popping up and we'd hit the stick. That, I remember, I don't know why. I must have enjoyed doing that or something.

WN: I think they call that game "*peewee*."

JN: Is that right? Is that? Could be.

WN: Yeah. I think lot of kids played that.

JN: Yeah, that, I seem to recall playing.

WN; Where would you play this? In your yard?

JN: Actually, it was right in front of the house, I seem to recall. Because the garage would be here, and there's an opening here. We'd play right in the middle. Funny.

WN: You talked about going under the house, you know, of the *saimin* lady, the house, things like that. Was it more like unstructured roving around kind of play?

JN: Yeah. I think there was a friend. The Sato boy was my age, I think. That's the reason we were playing at his house and we would go under the house and that kind of stuff. The rest of it, I can't recall who else came out. But there were a bunch of kids all the time, though, out there playing.

MK: How about things like marbles?

JN: Oh, yeah, yeah. We played with marbles. That, I remember. [Tape inaudible.] The other thing, oh, I got to, that's right. The other thing we played was samurai with the sword. Of course, my father, being a carpenter, made the sword for us. So I had the best-looking sword.

(Laughter)

JN: I still remember him making it. He was on the side. He says, "Ah, come here, I'm going make this sword for you." I don't know what he was doing to cut it, shave it down, and whatever it is.

WN: Out of wood?

JN: Yeah, right, right, right. Yeah, I remember we had sword fights.

WN: And what, did you friends just have a branch or a stick? (WN and MK laugh.)

JN: A stick, whatever they could find. Yeah, that's right. They would have like a broomstick running around and I'd come with my sword. (WN and MK laugh.)

JN: Yeah. That, I remember.

WN: Well, if you're playing samurai, were there like movies or opportunities for you to go to movies?

JN: Oh, yeah. We went to what is now Kaimukī Theatre. Kaimukī is gone now, I think. Queen's is still there.

WN: The building is still there, yeah.

JN: We used to go to Kaimukī or Queen, and we'd walk from Wai'alae. Walk, pass the graveyard, and then we'd go. What we would go there for, we'd watch *Superman*, what else was there? What's the guy, the red—I forgot his name.

WN: Red? Flash? No.

JN: Not Flash Gordon. No, there was another guy. I still remember him. But it'd also be—what was his name? There was this Japanese swordsman that had same thing like a Superman. There was a name. I can't remember.

WN: He was like a superhero?

JN: Yeah, yeah.

WN: Oh, yeah? Oh.

JN: From Japan. So they would show Japanese movies, too. In addition to *Superman*, there'd be Japanese movies and we'd go and watch, [a fictional swordsman] Tange Sazen.

WN: Tange Sazen? One eye, one arm.

JN: Yeah, yeah, yeah, Tange Sazen. That's right, Tange Sazen.

MK: Yeah.

JN: That's right.

WN: Now, you would walk from your house in Wai'alae to Kaimukī town?

JN: Yeah.

WN: What was Kaimukī town like growing up? Was it like the big urban area for you folks?

JN: That was it.

(Laughter)

We never went to downtown. So going to town was going to Kaimukī basically. Yeah.

MK: And what would be in town for you folks, you know, as kids before the war?

JN: Basically just the theater that we went to. I remember, we—I don't know why—I keep looking at that graveyard. We must have played in that graveyard.

WN: Graveyard? Which graveyard?

JN: If you walk up Wai'alae, I think it's still there. You walk on up Wai'alae, it's on the right side.

WN: Oh, by the old Wai'alae Drive In?

JN: Yeah. I don't think any of my family's buried there, but somehow we always fool around there for some reason on the way to Kaimukī, going to town. It was our town.

MK: You folks weren't scared?

JN: I'm sure we were.

(Laughter)

JN: I'm sure we were. But, you know, the attraction was irresistible, too.

MK: Mmm. That's funny.

WN: I know that you were only up to nine years old when you went to the war, but from the time you were growing up until age nine, did you have any chores around the house? Did you have to do anything?

JN: No, I guess, being the youngest, if anything's going to be done, it's going to be done by my older sisters and older brothers. The one thing I remember, though, speaking of all this, I remember one particular incident. As I told you, with this big house, we have this big table where eleven of us sat down. Well, it was very strict. For lunch, or dinner, or breakfast, everybody had to come in, and you had to sit down, and you had your place. Everybody had to sit down certain place. One incident I recall is that we were out there, all five of us out there, we were playing. Then my mother or grandmother or

grandparents were saying, “Come in and we’re going to have dinner. So come in the house, come in the house.” So, of course, nobody comes in then.

So finally my father comes out and he says, “Get back in the house.” So finally, we all get back in. He lines up the boys—the four or five boys—in a row, and he’s whacking them, one slap at a time. So he starts with my oldest brother. And I’m standing, I’m the last one down the line. By the time he gets to me, I’m crying. (Chuckles) So he just goes, *ponk*.

WN: Oh, just pats you on the head?

JN: So the rest of the brothers go, (makes noise), “We’ll get you!”

(Laughter)

WN: Oh, they grumbled?

(Laughter)

JN: Somehow that stuck in my mind. I still remember this big living room that we had. Before we sat down, he lined us all up. I can still see the wall with the five of us lined up and get a slap on the head.

WN: Now, this big table that you folks ate meals on, okay, it’s about eleven of you including your grandparents, your mother, your father, and your siblings and so forth.

JN: At that time—because my kid sister came later—so there were seven siblings, my parents, and grandparents.

WN: Did your mother cook for all eleven?

JN: Yeah, must have. One thing I remember, too, we had this big white house, but there was an outhouse right next that had the cooking facilities for rice. So the rice was cooked in that whatever thing. But what I remember most is washing the rice outside and then bring it in there. Then we had wood, right, pieces of wood that they burned. The smoke would go up in that building. That’s where our rice was cooked.

WN: It was a separate building ...

JN: Yeah, a separate building.

WN: ...from the house?

JN: Yeah.

MK: So your rice was cooked the real old-fashioned Japanese way in a *kama* with firewood?

JN: Yeah, yeah, firewood. That’s right.

MK and WN: Wow.

JN: That, I remember. I mentioned, I guess my mother had to cook for everybody. As I said, I don’t remember my grandmother being of much help, so I don’t know who. My sisters must have helped later on.

MK: How about things like laundry? Who was doing all the laundry, the cleaning?

JN: I assume it’s my mother. I don’t know.

MK: Would you remember any hired help in the household?

- JN: Could be, you know. My father had whole lot of people. I don't recall, but I bet he had people cleaning the house. (Chuckles) I don't remember my mother going around cleaning the house because it's so big. My grandmother never worked around, so I don't think she cleaned the house.
- WN: What about yard work? Do you remember anything?
- JN: Yeah. They had to cut the grass. Now who was cutting the grass, I don't recall. We had this big yard, both in the front and the back. I don't recall who did the cutting. Just my brothers? But I do remember there was grass there and I remember it was cut. We played there, but my dad also had lumber stacked there, too, and trucks in there every so often. We never knew for sure.
- MK: Then in terms of like, I guess, modern conveniences, did you folks have a phone?
- JN: Yes.
- MK: You had a phone.
- JN: I seem to recall couple, three, four phones in the house. Yeah. Because there was one, as I said, in between my parents' bedroom and the *furo*. I think my grandparents had one. There was one in the living room, something like that.
- MK: Refrigerator?
- JN: Oh, yeah, refrigerator. And radio. I had to listen to the radio. I remember sitting next—we had this big, it was on the floor, this big radio. I listened to the. . . What was I listening to? It wasn't "Superman."
- WN: *Shadow*?
- JN: *Shadow* maybe? Did they have it on radio?
- WN: Yeah.
- JN: Okay. Which one says, "Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men?" Is that one of those?
- WN: That's before my time.
- MK: Yeah, they did have that, though. I've heard it.
- WN: Sound familiar.
- JN: *The Shadow*.
- WN: *The Shadow*, maybe, yeah. [JN is correct.]
- JN: Yeah. That stuck in my mind. Something "lurking in the hearts of men." And as I said, I remember this big radio that sat on the floor and we'd be sitting on the floor listening to whatever they had.
- WN: Did you want to take a break?
- JN: No, no, I'm fine.
- WN: You feel okay? [WN asks about leg injury.]
- JN: Oh, yeah, I'm fine.

WN: Okay. I was wondering, you had in essence a three-generation household. And so you had your grandparents who obviously spoke Japanese. Well, your grandfather didn't speak, so. . . .

(Laughter)

You hardly heard him speak. But I was just wondering about your parents. What did they speak?

JN: I'm sure it was all Japanese. I can't even hear them, but I'm sure that's all they spoke. My father might have spoken some English to some people in his work. You know, to do work for some people, they have to speak English maybe, but I don't recall. Most of the time I'm sure he spoke Japanese.

WN: So how was your Japanese as a kid?

JN: You know, I don't recall speaking Japanese in the house, but I must have talked to my parents and grandparents. So my guess is—I'm guessing because I don't recall—is as I'm growing up until I'm five years old, I must have spoken Japanese only in the house because that's all. . . . Well, I'll speak English to my brothers, I guess, and sisters maybe. I really don't know. That's interesting.

WN: Yeah. Well, let's talk about school. You went to Wai'ala'e School from kindergarten to third grade.

JN: Yeah.

WN: And you also went to *Nihon-go gakkō*?

JN: Yes.

WN: Which Japanese-[language] school did you go to?

JN: It's just across the street on Wai'ala'e Avenue. What's there now? But anyway, that was the Japanese school. I remember there was like an auditorium there and everything. I remember there was a principal, lived nearby.

WN: So what was Wai'ala'e English school [territorial public school] like first, for you?

JN: Well, up to third grade, I told you, my third-grade teacher was Mrs. [Aiko] Reinecke.

WN: Reinecke, yes.

JN: But that's all I remember about my elementary school days. Because it's just that she came to visit me when I went to camp.

WN: Okay, we'll get to that, but I was wondering...

JN: But I don't remember...

WN: ...what kind of a teacher was Aiko Reinecke? Do you remember?

JN: I don't.

WN: Okay.

JN: I really don't know. Because school was something that was unimportant in my life, you know. I don't remember the classrooms even. What was I doing? I remember some of it after I came back like Lili'uokalani and then to Kaimukī Intermediate, but I don't recall. I just can't recall.

- MK: I'm curious, for someone who grew up with Japanese-speaking grandparents, Japanese-speaking parents, what was it like for you to go to school where the language is English for instruction?
- JN: I have no clear recollection but I had two older sisters, right, so they must have been teaching us English or speaking English. They must have been like their English version of trying to be older sisters. They were the oldest in the family so that was helpful, I think.
- MK: How about your older brothers? (Chuckles) The oldest brother. Were they helpful?
- JN: No, other than not to get beaten up by them. That's basically what I recall about my older brothers. I had to avoid getting beaten up by them.
- WN: How did they treat you being the baby of five brothers?
- JN: I think I was treated like the youngest and they really took care of me in many ways. I've never felt like they were really going to beat me up badly. I mean, I had to run every so often when they come chasing me when they got mad at me for doing something or the other. But in general, because I'm the youngest, I was not competitive in the struggle among brothers. I was not a threat to anybody so I was treated especially by my oldest brother, treat me like "you're in the way but what the hell" kind of a thing.
- MK: Were you allowed to kind of tag along and be part of the group?
- JN: Not the older group, I don't think. They wouldn't let me get close to them, I don't think.
- WN: So the friends that you hung out with in that area was mostly your friends, your age. You didn't hang out with your brother's friends and things like that?
- JN: No, not at that age, up to third grade. I think there's more—there's one family, there's one guy, I remember, one boy. Tominaga. I don't know why I remember his name. I used to run around with him.
- MK: Then when it came to Japanese-language school, how was that experience for you?
- JN: I'm assuming I went, but I don't have specific recollection. By the way, I'm generally pretty bad with my memory, our whole family. Our whole family, we keep kidding about how bad everybody's memory is actually. (MK and WN chuckle.) It runs in the family.
- WN: I think you're doing fine.
- MK: Yeah, yeah.
- WN: So you went to Wai'alae School. So after school, is that when you went to Japanese school?
- JN: Yeah.
- WN: Oh, okay.
- JN: And that was across the street from Wai'alae.
- MK: So no outstanding good or bad memories?
- JN: Of what?
- MK: Of Japanese school?



- JN: *Shee*, I don't remember teachers or anybody of the Japanese-language school. I wonder if I went. I just have no memory. I have some memory of it in Tule Lake, but. . . .
- MK: Before we go away from your youth then, I was wondering, in your family what kind of foods did you folks eat?
- JN: I have no memory, but I assume it's Japanese, some form of Japanese. Rice, for sure. Rice and what kind of Japanese food, I haven't the slightest idea. I can't close my eyes and recollect eating anything in particular.
- MK: When you shared the photos of your family house, the inside, there were some things there that were very Japanese like, and I was wondering when it came to things like Japanese New Year's, *Oshōgatsu*, how was that holiday celebrated?
- JN: I'm sure it was celebrated in a traditional way, but I can't specifically recall sitting down and having a New Year's family. Oh, I can't recall.
- WN: I was wondering, you said your father was like the village chief. Were there gathering or parties with the village, I mean, the people in that area or anything like that? Any kind of get-togethers?
- JN: The ones I know we've had a number of parties at the house, but who they were, I kind of get the impression they were general contractors and somehow business-oriented. What was the name of that. . . . Lewers & Cooke lumberyard somehow fits in. My old man always going over there to buy lumber and all that kind of stuff. He knew the people there. But anyway, what I remember is that in the middle of that, you know, you saw the picture of the family, well, if you go straight around—that's the back portion—if you go straight around, that's all open area and you can take away all the furniture. They put wooden tables. Everybody sat on the floor. There must have been, I don't know, 50, 100 people? I don't know how many people they had lined up. They'd all be eating. I don't know where the food came from. I can't imagine my mother preparing the whole thing. Must have ordered it. I just don't know. But I remember having parties. And I remember us staying in the bedroom looking out, seeing the party going on. Whether it was New Year's or what the occasion was, I don't recall.
- MK: I thought I'd ask about New Year's specifically because I was wondering, gee, would this family have had *mochitsuki*, you know, pounding *mochi*?
- JN: Yes. That, I remember. Outside, the pounding and the hands going in kind of thing. I remember them doing that. But who did it, I don't recall. But I know, again, just about the same place, we have this concrete place.
- MK: So you recall them pounding *mochi* on New Year's?
- JN: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Definitely.
- MK: Then with so many boys in the household, did you folks celebrate Boys' Day?
- JN: I don't think so.
- MK: No *koi* flying about your guys' house?
- JN: Could have been. I don't recall. Did they celebrate Boy's Day back then? Oh, they did, huh?
- WN: Put the fish out. Hang the fish out. I know some families did that.
- JN: I don't recall.
- MK: You were young, yeah.

WN: Prior to the war breaking out—and you showed us some photos—certain members of your family made trips to Japan in the [19]30s? Do you recall, for example, who went on these trips?

JN: Okay. There was one trip that I took with my parents. And I was the only one that went with them. It had to do with him taking money from the Fukuoka *kenjinkai* here in Hawai'i to Japan to give to the war efforts in Manchuria whatever. I remember going to Japan with my parents. (Chuckles) What I remember most distinctly and, again, that's my father's character, is that my mother got sick so he got stuck taking care of me. So he goes to a pool hall and he takes me to the pool hall. I remember sitting there watching him shooting pool.

(Laughter)

I don't know why, that just stuck in my mind.

JN: Think about it, though. The Japanese—I can't figure out where he learned how to shoot pool to begin with. And he played golf. So I remember going golf with him, too, back then. He was a character.

WN: I wonder why, in the late 1930s, your parents going to Japan and they taking only you.

JN: I don't really know.

WN: Maybe there was nobody to baby-sit you or something.

JN: I think so. That's probably it.

WN: Because you must have been all of seven, eight?

JN: Five.

WN: Oh, five, okay. So nineteen ...

JN: Thirty-eight, Nineteen thirty-nine, I think.

WN: Thirty-nine, yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay.

JN: I was five, six years old, I think. Yeah, but *chee*, that means I still had an older brother who's only a year or two older than me, so.

MK: On that trip, would you remember if you saw your maternal grandparents? Had they gone back to Japan by then?

JN: I don't know. But I don't recall seeing them.

MK: Yeah. Okay. Now, I was trying to think, oh, I wonder if they took you back to show you to the...

WN: Yeah, that's what I was thinking.

MK: ... maternal grandparents, you know, who had gone back. But you mentioned something interesting. Your father went to Japan to take (cellphone rings) monies... Oh, someone's phone.

WN: Not me.

MK: Okay. Your father went back to Japan to take back monies collected for the Japanese war effort, yeah, against China. And that was for the Fukuoka *kenjinkai*? What other Japanese community organizations was he involved with?

- JN: Somehow, I don't know, but I think he was involved with the Japanese school. See, as I said, I kind of had an impression he had just a third-grade education. I think he was trying to buy his way into bringing himself up. Because I seem to recall the principal of the Japanese school had to cater to my father because my father was raising the money for the Japanese school or something. That's the kind of activities he did. I think he did whatever he did to boost his own kind of image, I think.
- MK: Then active with the Japanese contractors' group?
- JN: Oh, yeah, yeah. I don't really know for sure what he did, but I'm pretty sure he helped run it for one thing. He was always. . . . I don't know where he got all of that.
- MK: Then when it came to things like religion, to what extent were your parents involved with any of the Buddhist or Shintō groups?
- JN: The only thing I remember is like those, you know, you saw in the pictures?
- MK: Mm-hmm.
- JN: Putting up incense and all that kind of stuff.
- MK: Oh, the family *butsudan*?
- JN: Is that what it is?
- MK: Yeah.
- JN: I just remember those things, but I don't remember going to a Buddhist church as such.
- MK: Okay. I was also wondering how much contact he had with, say, visiting Japanese naval ships or naval personnel?
- JN: I'm not sure what the connection is, but there was that picture of a guy that came who's apparently some kind of relative or connection. But I don't know why in my memory, I seem to recall going with him once to the port. I'm not sure why I was there or what he was doing, but seems like somebody was coming in. Maybe it was that guy that was in the picture, I'm not sure. I think it must have been a big thing in those days to have a relative who's in the navy for some reason, rather than army, for example. I'm not sure why.
- WN: So this is a photo that we looked at earlier, sort of a family photo. And there's one, a Japanese naval person in the picture.
- JN: Yeah.
- WN: So it looks like either a relative or someone that they knew who was in the Japanese navy.
- JN: Probably a relative, somehow or the other.
- WN: Okay.
- MK: Your dad was active, yeah? (Chuckles)
- JN: That, he was. He was that.
- MK: Yeah, he was active.
- WN: Well, this is a good place to stop. If you don't mind—I hope you're enjoying this.

JN: Oh, yeah.

WN: Okay, good.

JN: I'm going to get a copy, huh?

WN: Yes, definitely.

MK: Yes, yes.

JN: I want to give it to my kids.

WN: If there's a possibility to continue another day.

JN: Yeah, yeah.

WN: Because we have. . . . The first session we wanted to get your family background. And now we've got you right to about World War II where all hell is breaking loose, you know, for a lot of families like yours. So I thought we'd stop here and talk about December 7th, and going to Jerome and Tule Lake, and so forth. Okay?

JN: Yeah.

WN: Okay, we'll stop right here.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 57-21-2-12

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

James Nakano (JN)

Honolulu, Hawai'i

November 1, 2012

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN) and Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

WN: This is an interview with Mr. James Akinobu Nakano on November 1, 2012, and the interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and Michi Kodama-Nishimoto and we're at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa campus. And this is session number two with Mr. Nakano.

So, Mr. Nakano, good afternoon.

JN: Good afternoon.

WN: Last time we were talking about your family and circumstances around your father and ended up being part of and active in the Japanese community and so forth. And we got you right to World War II, the start of World War II, December 7, 1941. Oh, did you ...

MK: Actually, we have to back up just a little bit. Just a little bit ...

WN: Okay. We have a couple of questions first before we get to the war, Michi has some questions. Okay, go ahead.

MK: Prior to World War II, did family members visit Japan?

JN: Yes.

MK: Okay. Who went?

JN: For one thing, basically, half my family. I'm talking about my grandparents, two older sisters, and two older brothers. They're all older than I am. But six of them before the war. When exactly, I don't recall. Nineteen forty maybe. They went to Japan because my father sent them back to Japan, I think, with the ultimate intention—although I don't know this for sure—of all of us going back to Japan. Then, of course, the war broke out and we couldn't go. Frankly, I always thought, "Thank God"; otherwise, I'd be a farmer in Fukuoka but for the war kind of a thing. But I think that was the intention of sending half my family to Japan in 1940. Then the war broke out. So at that time when the war broke out, my parents were here and then there were three brothers still here. That was the situation on December the 7th, 1941.

MK: And I think you also mentioned that your father had been contributing to the Japanese war effort on the Asian continent against China?

JN: I think, and again, these are really vague memories, but my understanding is, I went with them. In fact, I was the only child to go with my parents to Japan. That was like 1939 or whatever it was—1938, '39. I was five years old, so that would be '38. I think that particular trip, he was the representative of some kind of group that he organized or he was a member of and they were taking money, I assume, to Japan for the Manchurian war effort, is what I recall. That's the purpose of us going to Japan in 1938.

- WN: Do you know why it was only you and not any of your brothers or sisters?
- JN: I think my mother just took the youngest. The only thing I can think of. Either that or I was such a baby, I wouldn't let her go without me or something. (WN and MK chuckle.) I'm not sure, don't know.
- MK: I was wondering, you know, your father was involved with this group that sent money, I mean, whose funds he helped take to Japan. I was wondering, what organizations did he participate in, to your knowledge, before the war?
- JN: Frankly, I have no idea. I'm sure there was some sort of organization, but I just don't know.
- MK: Okay. Now we can bring you back to World War II.
- WN: Well, let's talk about December 7, 1941. What do you recall of that day?
- JN: Clear in my mind for some strange reason is there was a *kiawe* tree in front of my house that kind of bent over the garage, is what I remember.
- WN: This is the big white house on 'Ō'ili Road?
- JN: 'Ō'ili Road.
- WN: Okay.
- JN: Somehow, I remember, that was a Sunday, and I remember there were two—why they were working there that day—in fact, I remember the name of one. There were two foremen, actually, who were working on Sunday and they were at my house. My house was like also a working place that had trucks and everything all over the place. There was a big yard and lumber and everything. But they were two guys there. One of them was Hirano. I forgot the name of the other one. They were two foremen, actually. What I remember was, apparently the news came out on the radio that Pearl Harbor was not only bombed but it was bombed by the Japanese. Somehow, that got out. Those two guys disappeared. I don't know why that stuck in my mind. They were gone, they're gone. And why, in my mind, they heard about the Japanese attack, I just have no idea. But the thing I remember clearly in my mind, I climbed up that tree, that *kiawe* tree, which is next to the garage, because I was nine years old, I climbed the tree because I wanted to see the smoke from Pearl Harbor. But you can't see the smoke from Wai'ālae. (Chuckles) Anyway, I remember climbing that tree to see if I could see smoke coming out from Pearl Harbor, wherever it was so. That is what I remember about December the 7th. I have, frankly, no other memory of that day. I don't have memories of talking to my mother, or my father, or them saying anything.
- WN: I know you mentioned, though, that you have some recollection or knowledge that there were some things that your parents had to get rid of that day?
- JN: Yeah, in one of the pictures, it showed pictures of Roosevelt and also of some Japanese ...
- WN: I think the emperor.
- JN: The emperor, naval commander, whoever it was. But I think the pictures of the Japanese, the emperor and the naval commander, as I recall, those came down and I don't know what else, but anything other than those Japan things, especially, if they were patriotic Japanese things. I remember somewhere in our yard, I think, they were digging a hole and burying these—they put it in a box or whatever it was—and they were burying these into the ground so that should the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] come, they wouldn't see any of these things. And that is my recollection.

- WN: Then the subsequent days and weeks in the war, what do you remember in terms of blackouts and other things?
- JN: I do have recollection of blackouts in the sense that we had to cover our windows so that light wouldn't show on the outside. I'm not sure what they did, but they put something on the windows and doors and wherever else to blacken it and then I guess we could turn the light on in the evening without light being emitted out of the house. That was because everybody, there was a blackout and they were concerned about military attacks and that kind of stuff.
- MK: I know that in those days there were families that had bomb shelters. How about in the case of your father's family and property?
- JN: I think it was on our property. I think my father made a bomb shelter for whole neighborhood. My dad, as I said, owned that big white house, but he also had a lease from, I assume, Bishop Estate, of that whole area. He had about five, six rentals to different people. He also had rentals going all the way from Wai'alae. From 'O'ili Road, you go up to Wai'alae, there was a bakery, there was a barbershop, there was a general store. He built those and rented out and collected rent from these people. That neighborhood. Basically, I think he made that bomb shelter for the whole neighborhood in case of any threat that everybody would run. It was somewhere in our yard, I think. As I said, we had a big yard so.
- WN: Do you remember going in it?
- JN: Yeah. I closed my eyes and somehow I can almost see the shelter with the bump on the top and us going down into it. I think some of that sticks in my mind.
- MK: I know that during that time people have mentioned that small children even had gas masks. How about yourself?
- JN: I don't specifically remember, but it seems like that's true that gas masks were passed out, I think, to everybody. But I can't recall having one. Maybe they did it after we left. I'm not sure.
- WN: Okay. Your father was picked up in February of 1942, I have here.
- JN: Yes.
- WN: So just about two, three months after December 7th. What recollections do you have of that day or that time, if any?
- JN: I do. Somehow, I remember, in the front of my house, my dad, he's dressed in a suit, I think. He's smoking a cigar, and he walks and there's about two, three FBI guys who come in and they're there to pick him up. He walks out the door with a cigar and dressed in a suit. Why I have that image, I don't know. If it actually happened or I just imagined, I'm not sure, but I close my eyes and I can see him walking out the front door and greeting the FBI guys. He may have offered them a cigar or something. It was almost like a show, so I'm not sure if I'm imagining this or somebody told me this. But I close my eyes, and I can see my old man walking out that door. But I wouldn't put it past him. (Chuckles) He had a way about him.
- MK: Then with you being so close to your mother, what recollections do you have of maybe your mother's reactions at that time?
- JN: I have no recollection of my mother's reaction. But if I know my mother, she was so stoic, she probably didn't show any. She was stiff upper lip and never said a word. The image I have of my mother is just pictures of my mother, the ones I have shown. She doesn't smile. She's like a rock. I considered her my rock kind of thing.
- WN: Well, you're still pretty young when she died.

JN: I was twelve, thirteen.

MK: Yeah, yeah.

WN: Okay. I know these are difficult questions because it was so far back and you were so young, but I'm just wondering if you have any sense of your father being absent from the big white house.

JN: Not really. As long as I have my mother, I think. . . . My father, even when he was at home all this time, all I can recollect is that he's always out of the house for some reason. I have recollection of him coming home drunk after parties with all the general contractors and whatever it is, they get together and go to the teahouse and they come. . . . One recollection of him coming home, I'm in the big white house and seeing him coming in. He had one of those geisha girls from the teahouse. He's trying to bring her into the house and my mother is at home. The woman runs away, I guess. But I also recollect him coming in and being drunk and he walks in into the bedroom—and apparently, I must have been in the same bedroom as they were at that time because although it was a big white house, there's one, two, three, there were four bedrooms. So there was one for my parents and me, actually; one for my two sisters; and then one for my grandparents. And then the five boys would have been in all one room, except that as I said, I think I stayed with my parents. What I remember, once or twice, maybe more often, my dad coming home drunk. We're on the floor obviously with *futon*, sleeping on the floor. And my mother is hitting him with *futons* and *zabutons* and that kind of stuff. He's ducking and hiding and that kind of, but he's obviously still drunk. But that memory I have sticks in my mind.

(Laughter)

He was something else.

(Laughter)

WN: So we know that your dad was sent to Sand Island [Detention Center], but I was wondering if you remember anything about the day that you had to leave to go to Jerome. What images do you have of leaving Honolulu to . . .

JN: I don't have any recollection of leaving the house, for some reason. So I don't even have an image of how I got to the [U.S.] Immigration [and Naturalization Center] building. I think that building's still here. It seems like it's the same building. But somewhere we got on a bus because I remember getting off the bus at the immigration. So where we got on the bus, I have no idea. I remember getting to that building, my mother and myself—and I assume my two brothers, but I don't remember them—getting off at the immigration building. And somehow, from there, getting on the ship. My understanding is that that ship was a passenger ship, the *Lurline*. Matson's *Lurline*, is what I recall people telling us that's what we were on.

WN: And your father wasn't with you at that time?

JN: No.

WN: He wasn't there.

JN: This is in November of 1942 when we went on the ship and on our way to Jerome.

WN: You said earlier that someone came to see you folks leave? Do you remember who that was?

JN: Yeah, it was. . . . Well, I was, as I said, eight or nine years old and, I remember, the second or third grade at Wai'alae in elementary school. That was walking distance from my house. But my third-grade teacher or second-grade teacher, whatever grade I was in, was Mrs. [Aiko] Reinecke. Why I had this clear memory of her being there, I guess, it



- was saying that, “Wow, my teacher came to see me off.” It was a big deal, I think. So she came just to see us off—I guess to see me. Whether she talked to my mother or not, I don’t have recollection. All I recollect clearly was that she was there when we left, at our house so. We must have gotten. . . . I don’t know how we left. I don’t know if we got on a car, a bus, or what.
- MK: Would you remember any thoughts she expressed or what did Mrs. Reinecke do?
- JN: I don’t know how—this might be things you remember because it might be something you created. I did get the feeling that one, that she was a little upset seeing us go. But it may be something I created in my mind afterwards. That’s probably how she would have been. But I don’t know why, but for me it was a big deal to think a teacher came to see me off. And I was like second, third grade. It was a big deal.
- WN: Well, the reason I ask you this is when you mentioned her name, Aiko Reinecke, she, in essence, devoted her life to civil liberties and, you know, she was opposed to anything dealing with the violation of civil rights and so forth. Her entire life, her and her husband, John Reinecke. So when you said she was there it doesn’t surprise us that she was there because she was probably very upset that you folks had to leave.
- JN: When was it when they were indicted for being Communists and this kind? That was a bad time and there was a whole bunch of people that—like the McCarthy era.
- MK: Yes.
- WN: Yes, this was in the [19]50s.
- JN: In the [19]50s?
- WN: Yeah. Could have been in the late [19]40s.
- JN: Because in 1953 I left for the Mainland. I’m not sure if it was before or after.
- MK: Before.
- JN: Must have been before, okay.
- WN: Late [19]40s. McCarthy era was maybe in the [19]50s, but this happened in the [19]40s.
- JN: And there were labor leaders, everything, all bunched together. Who did that? It bothers me, but I don’t recall, you know.
- WN: Usually people who were involved in these civil rights and civil liberties movements and protesting, they were targeted.
- JN: Yeah, yeah. I know I was indignant, but I’m just thinking I must have been still high school.
- WN: Right, right.
- MK: This would be like late 1940s. It was just very interesting to us that you told us about Aiko Reinecke actually coming to see a child. Yeah, that’s something, yeah?
- JN: Sounds like her in many ways, yeah?
- MK: Yeah. And I was wondering, what if anything, did you tell your friends? I mean, young as you were, what did your friends or neighborhood gang know about what was happening?
- JN: I have no idea. Absolute no idea.

- WN: You know why? Because you didn't have any idea what was happening to you.  
(Chuckles)
- JN: Yeah, yeah. We're on a boat trip.
- WN: Yeah, yeah. (Chuckles)
- JN: Get on the *Matsonia*, coming back.
- WN: Can you tell us now, who was with you when you folks got on the *Lurline* Who in your family, besides you and your mother?
- JN: My two other brothers would have been with us. Jitsuo and Colbert.
- WN: And Bert, okay.
- JN: Toshitaka was his middle name.
- WN: Okay. And what about William and Henry?
- JN: They had gone to Japan.
- WN: Oh, they're in Japan.
- JN: Yeah, my two brothers, two sisters, and my grandparents were in Japan.
- WN: I see, okay. So it was five of—four of you.
- JN: Five. No, four. My dad had gone ahead.
- WN: Mom, you, Jitsuo, and Bert.
- JN: Yeah, right.
- WN: Okay. Do you have any recollections of being on the *Lurline*?
- JN: Yeah. We had—I don't know what you call it—but we had a separate room for my mother and me. And I think, I'm not sure how this worked out, but I think I got a special room because I got the mumps. I think I recollect, I'm thinking, oh, this is great for my mother, although I got mumps. She gets a separate room rather than with the whole group. I'm guessing, I have no idea, but there must have been separate rooms on the luxury ship, right? But there must have been at the bottom where the can goods or whatever else weighed the most from the mass of the people were, I'm guessing. And where the crew would have been. I'm assuming my two brothers were down there someplace. Because on our way back, it's like a repeat. I remember coming back, my mother had my youngest sister who was like three months old, so she got a room. I didn't want to stay with my brothers, so I ran up and stayed with my mother in her room.
- MK: How were you taken care of with mumps on the *Lurline*?
- JN: Oh, there was a doctor who was in that same group. Why they had a doctor grouped in with us, I have no idea. What was his name?
- MK: Was that Dr. . . .
- JN: Dr. Miyamoto.
- MK: Kazuo Miyamoto.

- JN: Is that right?
- MK: We've heard about him.
- JN: Okay. He had a son. I think he was my age also.
- WN: Oh, was it Victor?
- JN: I think, yeah, that sounds familiar. Yeah, I think it was Victor. I think he and I were about the same age. When I developed that mumps, I have no idea. But I seem to recall this Dr. Miyamoto taking care of me on the way over. There weren't too many doctors, but he was the guy everybody looked up to. He was the leader and he was a guy everybody looked up to. Victor, that's correct, yeah.
- WN: Yeah. We have his number. We need to call him.
- MK: We might try to call him.
- WN: Wouldn't that be something. (Chuckles)
- MK: And he is your age, born the same year.
- JN: Yeah, if you guys don't mind, I wouldn't mind calling him and I'll go buy him lunch or something. Just to go back and just to say, "Victor, you remember?" But what happened afterwards, I don't recall either. But I remember on that boat, Victor and then his father, of course, was. . . . Oh, that's right, yeah. Victor. We went to Tule Lake. They must have been gone someplace else other than—I mean, from Jerome, we went to Tule Lake. They must have left, gone out, my guess. There were a group of people who left Jerome and went to like Minneapolis. I have in-laws. My brother's wife, her family, the Sugita family, they got out of Jerome and instead of going to Tule Lake, they went to Minneapolis.
- MK: Mumps, that's an infectious condition.
- JN: That's what I thought.
- MK: Did you give it to anybody else like Victor?
- JN: I think I did, you know. I think Victor got the mumps from me. (WN laughs.) I better ask him.
- WN: That's funny. Because it seems like you were quarantined. If you were to get a room with your mother, maybe ...
- JN: Could be, could be.
- WN: Looks like some kind of a loose quarantine. So they didn't want to put you with the masses.
- JN: Maybe that's why my mother got a room. Because of my mumps.
- WN: Maybe.
- JN: No, I think that's probably what happened.
- WN: Boy, that sounds pretty miserable, though. Being on a boat with the mumps.
- JN: Well, not only that. Before the war, I went to Japan, right? I was seasick both ways. I was seasick going and coming back again. I've got this very bad weak stomach. Can't take it. Even to this day, I won't get on a boat.

MK: So you had mumps and seasickness.

JN: Yeah.

WN: (Chuckles) That's miserable.

JN: Yeah, it sure was.

WN: After *Lurline*, I mean, I think you folks landed in Oakland? I don't know if you would ...

JN: Yes.

WN: Yeah, Oakland. Do you remember the train ride from the West Coast to Jerome?

JN: Yeah, I remember the train ride more clearly than I remember the boat ride. I'm not sure why.

WN: You weren't seasick. (Chuckles)

MK: You weren't so sick.

JN: I wasn't sick at all. It was something I enjoyed. I mean, that's probably the reason because you can see. Looking out the window and you can see the mountains and all that kind of stuff. And obviously, I'm with my mother. So I remember going from Oakland. Of course, the incident I remember about getting on the train in Oakland, there's this military, the guard, soldiers guarding us as we got on to the train. My brother Bert gets on the train, sees this soldier, he opens the window, and throws the finger at him and every other thing and probably said a few obscene words to the guy, I'm not sure. But the guy got so mad trying to catch my brother, my brother took off.

(Laughter)

That's what I seem to recall. But that's so typical of my brother Bert. He's the one ending up, by the way, asking the government and I think he was the guy that ultimately got us [reparations] twenty grand each kind of.

WN: Oh, yeah, he was very active in the reparations movement, yeah?

JN: Yeah, my recollection, he got mad at JACL [Japanese American Citizens League] for being so timid about asking for money, so he said, "The hell with the JACL." He went and did it on his own. But again, that's typical of who he was.

MK: Then you were saying on the train to Jerome, it wasn't like it was on the ship. You didn't have mumps—well, you weren't seasick. So what was it like for you on the train?

JN: My recollection is, I enjoyed it. I don't know how many days it took us, but being on the train and seeing the views of the mountains and fields and all that kind of stuff, I have nothing but good memories of it. I'm not sure why.

WN: Do you remember snow?

JN: No, I don't remember snow at all. The train, I would imagine, would have hit like Montana, the northern part of the U.S., but I don't remember snow until, I think, Tule Lake. Because Arkansas, I don't recall any snow there. I recall swamps, but no snow.

WN: Okay, any more questions on the journey over?

MK: No.

WN: So when you got to Jerome, can you sort of give us a description of what you remember of the physical nature of the place?

JN: Yeah, what I remember, of course, the barracks. In Jerome there were three blocks for Hawai'i people: Blocks 38, 39, and Block 40 was about half, half *kotonks* and half from Hawai'i. I was in Block 40. Each block, what I remember, would have a ditch all the way around it. That was our—what do you call that? Can't think of the word. It took care of the water draining right around the block. It would drain into this ditch that they built for each block. Now, where that water went afterwards, I have no idea. But that's how each block was, I think, built so it would drain into the ditch right around the block. We had a word for it, but I can't recall what it was.

What I also remember when we first got to Jerome, when we first started meeting the *kotonks*, the people from Hawai'i were barefooted even in November. It's kind of cold in November. But we would run around barefooted and what I remember most was, the *kotonks*, young *kotonk* kids, and they were basically farm kids, I think, because that's what they did. They were basically very nice farm kids. The Hawai'i kids, some of them were like from Liliha, Kalihi. They were gang-oriented. Part of Wai'alaie in those days was also gang-oriented because my brother Bert was also in one of those gangs. So the Hawai'i people, young kids, knew how to fight in gangs. The *kotonks* were just nice farm kids and they had no idea what fighting was all about. So they would come in and they would see us walking around barefoot, running around, and they would call us "savages." We couldn't catch them because they'd call out, "Savages, savages." They'd run away. Then we would say, "We'll wait until school starts, and we'll catch those kids." I don't think I did it, to be honest, but the Hawai'i people—I may have seen it or watched it or whatever it is—would look after and find these *kotonk* kids and find out which one called us "savages." They'd catch these kids and beat 'em up, take their pants off, and throw them into the ditch. In the mud, in the ditch, basically. That's so clear. It's as if I'm still there. I can just see us catching the kids, running and fighting, and throwing them into the ditch. (WN chuckles.) That's my recollection of my first encounter with the *kotonk* kids.

I remember there were football games. Again, I'd see my brother playing football—both of them—playing football. One of those pictures, there were all football players, you know, those pictures on the. . . . Both my brothers played football.

WN: Oh, is that when they're sitting on the ditch?

JN: Yeah, yeah. I think that may have been the football team, I'm not sure. One thing I remember, for some strange reason is, with all our animosity towards the *kotonks*, there's one guy from San Pedro. I don't know why I remember him. He was, I think, a year or two older than I was, but he took me under his, what do you call. He kind of looked after me. He was from San Pedro, but was more like—I don't know why—he was more like a Hawaiian guy in a sense that I think in San Pedro and certain parts of Los Angeles, they were gang-oriented also. So it was almost like, "Yeah, I know what you guys—I understand." He was not a farm boy like all the other nice kids were. He was more like the Hawai'i kids that came out of Kalihi. But he kind of took me under his wings and I remember being around with him a lot. As I said, I was more like his younger brother than anything else. He took care of me.

MK: Oh, so you made a friend.

JN: Yeah, yeah, I really did. But I can't recall his name. I'm sorry, what else about Jerome?

WN: Oh, no, I just asked you to describe physically what it was, but you're doing great describing what you remember. The people that you met.

JN: The other thing was, obviously, in Jerome—not very far from the camp or within the camp—Jerome, I don't remember any fences. I remember fences at Tule Lake, but no fences at Jerome. Why that is, I have no idea. Either that, or I couldn't see it, it was too far away. But what I remember is, the whole bunch of people from the camp. For me, I guess, it was the Hawai'i people. They would go out—and I think we were just there as

- kids to fool around with them—but they would go out into a swamp area. I remember we went to the swamps to look for snakes, water moccasins, what I recall. I seem to recall, these are adults, now, older guys. They got a stick—not a stick, a big branch. So that they would go and catch the snake as it went by. They'd tie it and they would bring it back. I remember seeing that kind of snake, first exposure to snake, but I remember seeing. They brought it back and they put it in cages, I think, so that the young kids can look at it. As I said, this was in the swamps area. So that sticks in my mind.
- MK: Having once lived in a pretty comfortable house, you know, separate bedroom for the boys, grandma folks, for your parents, your sisters, you folks had a nice house just for yourselves.
- JN: Let me describe one more thing there. We had a big *furo* house. *Furo* right in that house. It was in between. There was a *furo* with a shower. We used to take a shower and go into the *furo* afterwards. That, as I said, my father is a general contractor, he can build things that he wants to.
- WN: Oh, you think that your father built it?
- JN: Yeah. I mean, he had it built in so far as I don't know where he got the material.
- WN: Was it in your barracks?
- MK: No, no. He's talking about in ...
- JN: In the big white house in Wai'alae.
- MK: ... the big white house.
- WN: Oh, okay.
- JN: The white house.
- MK: So having had that kind of situation and now you come to Jerome, what was it like?
- JN: Okay. You saw that picture. It showed I was in Block 40 and that was in this particular barracks. Within that barracks, somewhere in the middle, it was assigned to my mother, myself, and my two brothers. So I remember in that area that was assigned to us, there was a potbellied stove. As I said, these guys who went out in the swamps, one of the things they did was cut lumber and they brought it in. I remember, in the middle of the block, there was this huge amount of lumber just stacked up. People just go there and people cut it and leave it there. Then people would take it back to their barracks. We had a potbelly and then we would feed [it]. That was to keep us warm during winter. So that would be in the middle of this area, barracks, that we had. Within that area, I remember my mother and my brother guys stringing, it must have been blankets or something to divide up into rooms. So we had bunks, I think folding bunks, that we brought in. Then we had these rooms, I remember, being built. Rooms, but it was. . . . I'm not sure, sheets or what they were hanging. Blankets is my guess. They were hanging blankets to have different rooms for different people. How many of these that we had, I don't know. But the main thing for me was that potbellied stove that was there that kept the room warm.
- To go to each block, you have barracks all lined up where people lived. In the middle, there was one big barrack. One was for the men and one was for the women. The showers were all there. People went there for the showers. And bathroom. There was no separate—you had to come out to the bathroom. Further down, there was another barracks built. That's where they had the cafeteria. So everybody went there for their food to eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The people who were in that camp also worked there. The thing I remember most, and I'm not sure why, is—who built it, I don't know—we had a box with a cover on it. The left-hand side, there was this hole, *puka*. For drinks like milk or whatever it is, you put it where that *puka* was or where that hole was. I remember my brothers—I'm not sure if I was too young to carry it—but they would go to

the cafeteria, fill it up with food and drinks, and they would bring it back to the barrack and we would have dinner or breakfast or lunch or dinner, whatever it is. I'm not quite sure how often we did that. Seemed to me we were eating in our barracks almost all the time. Because I seem to recall, on special occasions, we would go to the cafeteria—like Christmas or whatever it is—we'd go eat with everybody else. But I think most of the time, we were eating at home, whether it's breakfast, lunch, or dinner. Of course, we don't cook, right? So we always had these boxes. With these boxes, we'd bring the food home.

MK: Would your brothers be eating meals with you and your mom, too, or would they go gallivanting?

JN: I kinda got the feeling they go gallivanting most of the time.

(Laughter)

I don't remember them being around much. Every so often, I remember my older brother trying to control my younger brother Bert. Bert was always a rebel. And Jits, my older brother, tried to be like the father and control him, but. . . . One thing Bert was smart enough to know that they're both like—if I'm five [feet], eight [inches], or five, nine, they're closer to six footers, both of them. My oldest brother was built like a football player. In fact, he was at McKinley [High School in Honolulu]. He turned out for the football team. Bert was little skinnier. Tall and skinny. So when Jits said, "You better listen to me," Bert knew he was going to get beaten up if he didn't listen to his older brother. But that didn't stop him from running off and doing his own thing anyway.

MK: You were mentioning that at least your family had that box. Kind of pretty good box. I mean, you could accommodate a drink and the food, and have a cover, and bring it. Was that a box that only you folks had or other people had that kind of thing?

JN: I don't remember.

WN: I wonder if your father made it. Oh, no, your father wasn't there, that's right.

JN: My father wasn't there.

WN: I'm sorry.

JN: I don't know where we got that from. But I distinctly remember that box coming.

MK: First time we've heard this description . . .

WN: Yeah, first time I heard that.

MK: . . . of this kind of container.

JN: I get the feeling that we ate most of our meals at home. Whether my brothers were there, too, I don't remember if they were eating with us or. . . . I'm sure my mother had very little control over both of them.

MK: Like when you were coming over to Jerome, you had mumps, you had seasickness. Once you folks got to Jerome, were there other occasions when you or your mom or brothers got sick?

JN: No, I can't recall. No.

MK: That's good. (Chuckles) That's good you folks didn't get sick.

WN: You mentioned earlier that some people in the blocks would work in the cafeteria, for example, the mess area. Did anyone in your family work while being at Jerome?

JN: No, we were all too young, I think. Fourteen, fifteen. I think my oldest brother was like fourteen, fifteen years old at that time. So no, nobody worked.

MK: So like your mom, what did she do most of the time?

JN: I really don't know. My mother is such a mystery to me. Yet, I stuck to her like glue, but I don't remember her. . . . I can't hear her voice. She was always uptight, though. She was always uptight.

MK: Like you were saying you would kind of stick around your mom, but would you know what your brothers were doing?

JN: (Chuckles) No, not at all.

(Laughter)

But I can imagine my brother Bert would have been doing all the things he's not supposed to do. That is almost a certainty. What I remember most was—I don't know why this image of him, of Bert—he's in a gym and he's playing basketball. Somehow, the principal walks in and tells Bert, "What are you doing here when you're supposed to be in class?" In my mind, the image I have is my brother using some obscenity towards the principal and running off. I don't think he went to classes while he was in Jerome and probably. . . . No, in Tule Lake it was a little different, that's right. Tule Lake, (chuckles) he decided he's going to go back to Japan, I think, and he had this *hachimaki*. He belonged to this group of radicals that were going to go and do trouble with the people in camp and whatever. One thing I remember, my brother Jits saying, "Because you were in that group, they mistook me for you and they sent me back to Japan." I seem to recall Jits blaming Bert for it kind of. But they always had that going between the two.

MK: You were saying that you think at Jerome, your brother Bert not in class that much, but how about you?

JN: I don't remember school at all at Jerome. But there must have been some kind of class because, as I say, the thing I remember—and again, where these memories and images come from, I don't know, but I remember one thing that apparently there was school. There was this *haole* teacher who came, she was an Arkansas teacher. They came into camp and were teaching in Jerome. She decided that apparently my brother Jits was doing so well, she wanted to take him out so that he could go to a better school outside. And my father said, "No. No, you're going to go back to Japan." That's what I remember. Well, part of it is just guilt but I always felt like what if he had used my father's money and gone to college. He was the guy with the brains, I thought. What would he have done? But anyway.

MK: I wonder what you remember or what you noticed about children doing for fun at Jerome?

JN: In Jerome, let's see, what were we doing?

MK: You folks went in the swamp for the water moccasin.

JN: I remember those basketball courts in each block and I remember us playing basketball. I remember going to see my brother play football. Both of them play football. I'm assuming they also played basketball, I think. So there were sports going on for the younger kids. I remember, even I was playing basketball on the basketball court. Did I play baseball? I don't remember playing baseball. But there were sport events going on.

MK: How about like things like Christmas, was that something that was celebrated in camp?

JN: Yes, I think it was celebrated—again, the cafeteria became the main focus of the celebration. They had for Christmas and New Year's. Obviously for New Year's more so, I would guess, for the Japanese New Year's. But I think for Christmas, too, they had



extra food and whatever it is. We may have gone to eat there on occasions like that, special occasions, rather than taking home the food.

MK: How about like movies?

JN: Did we have movies? I don't remember. I was too young to go to the movies, I think. I can't recall.

MK: You folks would bring back to eat in the barracks, what kind of food were you folks having?

JN: (Chuckles) I have no idea. I really have no idea. I'm guessing we had rice, though, for some reason, rather than potatoes. But other than that, I . . . All my life, even to this day, food has always been so low on my interests.

(Laughter)

MK: Yeah?

JN: I pay no attention to food. I still don't.

WN: Food is fuel to you, huh, only?

JN: Yeah, it's something I got to do so.

(Laughter)

WN: Shall we move on to Tule Lake [Segregation Center]?

MK: Yeah. Oh, well, I was just wondering, when did you get together with your father? That's one of the reasons some of these families went.

JN: There was one occasion while we were in Jerome. This, I think, this was related to me by somebody else later on who told me about it. He's older than I am. He said he and my brother—and my brother took my mother, so I must have stayed back in camp with my other brother. Apparently, he got on—oh, I remember—he said they got on the train and they went to Santa Fe or wherever my father was, to visit him. I remember him saying what shook him—what he remembers is, getting on the train or bus, the black guys had to sit in the back and they were sitting in the front. He said that was really tough from what he remembers. But I recall they did go and visit my dad. That's what I was told. I don't remember my mother going, but apparently she did.

MK: But then your father did come to Jerome?

JN: Yeah, he came back only for the purpose of joining us and going to Tule Lake. So it was like we were like year and a half in Jerome, and he then came from Santa Fe [Department of Justice Camp]. Then we all got on the train and went to Tule Lake.

WN: Okay. So it was fairly short. He was there in Jerome just for a short while.

JN: Yes. That's my recollection.

WN: Do you have any recollection of seeing your father for the first time after all those years?

JN: Not really. I see him by the train somehow, and I'm not sure if he got off or was going to get on with us. I don't remember. But somehow, I see him standing there by himself, though, by a train or bus. Like either he was going to go or he just got off. I can't recall. But that's my only recollection when he got in.

MK: But the family did go together to Tule Lake?

- JN: Tule Lake, yes. I just don't recall the train ride back, though, for some reason. I remember the train ride coming to. . . .
- WN: Well, tell us about Tule Lake. What do you remember about Tule Lake?
- JN: One, it was a bigger camp, it seems, than it was in Arkansas, in Jerome. It was a former lake so I remember the gravel, black-grey gravel. Rather than dirt, there's a ground like, I seem to recall, just brown, grey gravel. Apparently was bigger than Jerome because the block numbers were higher. We were in Block 40 when we were in Jerome. We were in Block 84 when we got to Tule Lake. We were on the up, for some reason, Block 84. My guess is that it was built for us to get there, so it was built later on. We were right on the top of Tule Lake and we were looking down on the rest of Tule Lake. Now Tule Lake, they had fences all the way around. Not far from where we were I could see this mountain Castle Rock in my mind and the painting by Hiroshi Honda is of that Tule Lake from Castle Rock. That Castle Rock section. Somehow, I'm not sure how, somewhere near or at Castle Rock, the thing I recall most is, we could look down. We got to a cliff and we look straight down and below was Oregon. I recall the highway going right by there. Somehow, it sticks in my mind. Again, whether this is accurate or not, I don't really know for sure, but that's what sticks in my mind looking down.
- WN: You said earlier that you had no recollection of fences at Jerome; whereas in Tule Lake, you do have recollections of fences. What is your recollection?
- JN: I remember playing with a bunch of other guys my age in Tule Lake. We would play near the fence not far from a guardhouse or what do you call that?
- WN: Towers?
- JN: A tower, guard tower. The other thing, as we were about ten, eleven years old, about three, four of us, I recall. In Tule Lake they had—what do they call these bushes that were. . . .
- WN: Oh, the rolling. . . . Tumbleweed.
- JN: Tumbleweed. A whole bunch of them there. I remember us using that. We would get some kind of rope or string, and we'd prepare a hook on it, put some kind of food on it, probably bread. Put the tumbleweed over it and then we'd hide under. And we'd get more tumbleweeds and we'd all hide. We were waiting for the bird to come it. It was not a pelican, but what do you call it? It was a big bird. There are a lot of them in—what do they have in lakes?
- WN: Seagulls?
- JN: Seagulls. Seagulls would come in and what we'd try to do is hook it and we'd pull it in and get red paint and paint *hinotama*?
- MK: *Hinomaru*?
- JN: *Hinomaru* on it. And then there's a guard tower, right. Then we'd throw it up, hoping the guard would shoot it because we'd never seen a guy. . . . But I remember doing all these things. I don't recall whether or not it actually happened. I don't recall a guard. I don't recall us catching a bird. I think we did, though, you know. Hook the bird and then painting it. But in my memory, it's like we did it. But I don't recall at all the guard shooting. But somehow, I can almost see the guard out there with his rifle. I'm not sure how much of it is imagination and how much of it is for real.
- (Laughter)
- WN: Well, let me try to think of it from a kid's perspective. You would catch white birds, paint the Japanese red rising sun underneath the wings to sort of make them look like airplanes, right?

JN: Yeah.

WN: Yeah. And then thinking that if you had them fly by the guards, the guards would kind of think they're airplanes?

JN: No, I think the guard would think like, "What the hell these birds with all these...

(Laughter)

JN: ... Japanese, what do you call, so he'd shoot it, you know. That's what we were hoping for. I don't think that ever happened. That was our intention, though.

WN: Interesting.

JN: That sticks in my mind so much. I still seem to recall being right near that fence and not far from that guard tower.

WN: It's interesting that if Tule Lake is, in your mind, bigger than Jerome, and yet at the same time, you had the sense of being confined because you could see the guard tower and the fences at Tule Lake; whereas you weren't aware of anything at Jerome.

JN: I don't remember fences at Jerome.

WN: Interesting.

JN: Do you know if they had fences? I don't recall. I don't think they did.

MK: We've heard different things.

WN: Yeah, there are others that said they don't remember seeing fences, either.

JN: Yeah, I really don't recall.

MK: We're also speculating between Warren and myself, maybe for some of you folks, maybe you folks were so small or so young that you were maybe more limited in the areas that you explored or how far you would notice things. We're not sure.

JN: Well, in Jerome, we may have been in the middle of the whole camp so we may not have been the outside; whereas when we were in Tule Lake, I know we were right at the edge so we would be near a fence.

MK: Yeah. And you knew there were guards.

JN: Oh, that, yeah.

MK: You knew the guard towers.

JN: Till this day, I play golf every so often at Royal Kunia. I forgot what hole it was, but there's this shot—remember there was this explosion and people got killed? There was an explosion in one of those valleys near the Royal Kunia.

WN: Oh, yeah?

JN: There were, gee, four, five people were killed.

MK: Oh, they were using it for storage for fireworks or something.

JN: Yeah, and the thing blew up.

MK: Okay, yeah.

JN: Well, that valley, on the top of it, is Royal Kunia. That's where the bomb was. It's like a little valley. But in there, there's a guard tower there. Every time I'm playing golf there, I look at the guard tower. It reminds me of Tule Lake.

MK: Yeah? Oh.

JN: So next time if I ever go with. . . Ted Izawa?

WN: Ozawa.

JN: Ozawa. Tell him, "Does that remind you of Tule Lake?"

WN: Plus also, we know that Tule Lake was the destination of those who expressed a preference or desire to eventually go back to Japan. So that probably explains why you folks were there because your father probably expressed his desire to go back to Japan. So I was just thinking, maybe it was more secured than other areas because there were these people who might have been closer to Japan.

JN: I think so.

WN: It's just my thought, you know.

JN: No, I think that's true. One is, we were in a group, we were called the no-no camp because we were going to a no-no camp. Because in that there was ...

MK: That questionnaire.

JN: Two questions basically. If you may have said "no" on both of them, you went to Tule Lake.

WN: Something to do with loyalty.

JN: Yeah. "Will you pledge allegiance to the United States?" He might have put "no."

WN: "Would you serve in the armed forces?"

JN: Put "no."

WN: Put "no."

JN: That's right. So I'm sure my dad put "no" on both of them, so then we went to Tule Lake basically.

MK: So when you think about Tule Lake and Jerome, right now, you already cited one difference, yeah? Fence, no fence. Tule Lake, clearly you were conscious of a fence. What other differences or similarities were there that pop out in your mind?

JN: Well, when we got to Tule Lake, as I said, they called it a no-no camp and we were all going to go back to Japan. When we went to school, it was all Japanese[-language] school. We didn't go to any English school. I'm not sure where Bert went, but. . .

(Laughter)

As I said, he got into this group of guys that put that band on their heads and they were going to do something or the other. You know, had to do with anything that was rebellious he was in there.

I remember going to the Japanese school. The thing I remember most is this guy from Japan, of course, is teaching. He's one we call *kibeis*. So he's teaching the Japanese as a tough guy. You know how strict and tough they are, the Japanese school teacher. Here come these Hawai'i guys and they're in there taking Japanese. Couple of these Hawai'i guys, again, are Kalihi, Pālama kids, and Liliha kids. One of 'em, really tough kid. Little older than I was but he was tough. He'd be in class. The teacher would tell him something to do, and he would say, "F-you." So the teacher went after him. He turned around and punched him. To this day, I remember, because it was like, okay, Hawai'i kids (chuckles) going to start punching. Now we're going to punch the teacher.

(Laughter)

You know, for nine, ten years old, that was something else. But I remember that. I remember the Japanese school discipline that we're supposed to be under. But the Hawai'i kids wouldn't fit in.

WN: So you don't remember English school at all at Tule Lake? It was only Japanese school that you went to?

JN: I'm pretty sure. I'm pretty sure we only had Japanese school.

WN: I guess so, yeah? Makes sense. You said you going go to Japan ...

JN: Because we were going to go back to Japan.

MK: Interesting.

WN: So what did you think of Japanese school?

JN: You know, I didn't like schools anyway, whether English or Japanese. So I don't remember much, to be honest. Other than, as I said, that incident: the other guy punching the teacher. That's weird, I remember. I don't recall anything else.

MK: Someone had just told us that at Tule Lake there would be boys or young men who would have *hachimaki* on their heads. In the mornings maybe they would be sort of doing these exercises or something or going around saying, "*Wasshoi, wasshoi*."

JN: That's my brother.

MK: Your brother was in that ...

JN: That, I remember. That "*Wasshoi, wasshoi, wasshoi*." I think younger kids were trying to copy that. They would run around, band around, and they run in disciplined groups kind of a thing, right? "*Wasshoi, wasshoi*." I'm sure my brother Bert was a leader in that, too. He (chuckles) was something.

WN: What about the barracks? How would you compare the barracks or the facilities at Tule Lake as opposed to Jerome?

JN: Gee, they were very much alike. Barracks are barracks, I think. Looks like the same kind of military barracks both places. I'm trying to think whether or not ... As I said, I remember putting up these blankets to make rooms. But I don't remember doing that in Tule Lake. My father was there. By the way, we got to Tule Lake, my father's there. He gets a bicycle for some reason. And he gets paid nineteen dollars a month. He was an entrepreneur type anyway. So he rides on a bike. That was the biggest deal. He has a bike. (MK chuckles.) He goes, he gets paid nineteen—that's the highest pay you could get. It was between nineteen or seventeen. But the big wheels got nineteen dollars a month. He got a bike with it and he would go from cafeteria to cafeteria. What he did, I have no idea. But he would travel all over. What he did, I have no idea. All I remember is that he had a bike and I wanted to ride the bike. (MK chuckles.) But I look back and I think, wow, how the hell did he get that bike? What did he do exactly for that? I'm not

- quite sure. But I know it had to do with cafeterias, though. He would visit all these different cafeterias.
- WN: Sounds like a good job. (Laughs)
- JN: Yeah, I look back, and I think, wow. I never respected my dad until after he died, actually. I used all his money to go through law school and everything, but I always looked down on him. Partly, I think, I looked at him through my mother's eyes. So I remember after my mother died, I get in a car with him here in Honolulu, we're back. He's driving. I'm telling him what to do. "Watch out for this car, watch out for that car." I'm thinking, *Shee* I can't believe my father tolerated that from his youngest son.
- WN: You know, when you said "nineteen dollars a month," you said that was the highest, I think it was. Because we knew a doctor, who was a doctor already working in the hospital ...
- JN: (Chuckles) Nineteen dollars.
- WN: ... getting that amount. So your father must have had a pretty important job, yeah?
- JN: Had to do with cafeteria, but I have no idea what. I mean, what does he know about food? I don't think he knew much about food.
- WN: Do you remember if he used his carpenter skills at all in the barracks or the camp?
- JN: Not at all. Not at all.
- MK: He didn't kind of fashion things to make barrack life little bit more comfortable or furnishings or anything like that?
- JN: Not at all. Somehow I remember the barrack life in Jerome, but I don't remember or hardly remember what our room looked like in the barracks in Tule Lake for some reason. I'm not quite sure why.
- WN: And yet you remember school at Tule Lake more than Jerome.
- JN: Yeah. What I do remember clearly in Tule Lake was, my mother was so embarrassed. She was in her forties and she got pregnant when my dad came out, after he came out of camp. I mean, when we got together in camp. She got pregnant and she was in her forties and she was so embarrassed. The next thing, of course, my dad and my brother got shipped out, right, so that left my brother Bert, who was always in trouble, right, and myself. And now, my mother is in the hospital, she is sick, and we have a . . . *shee*, my kid sister must have been like two weeks old. They sent her back to us, two brothers, one fourteen and one ten, to raise two-weeks-old infant. That's incredible. But we—"we" being, must have been Bert's job now, because I didn't know what to do. So he would make milk somehow. I seem to recall him making milk. Where he got the milk, I don't know, to warm it up. Of course, his idea was make a lot so we can feed her as we go along. So he would put it out on the window sill to keep it cold or whatever it was. Then of course, the milk soured and he fed her soured milk. She got into trouble. So finally, I remember, we had to send my kid sister, who was at this point about one month old, to some couple. Who they were, I don't know. But I remember there was a couple with no kids who took care of my kid sister when she was about a month old, because my mother is in the hospital and my brother and I can't take care of my kid sister. I remember visiting that family just to go visit my kid sister. But I remember those two, that couple, raised my kid sister until it was time to go home. So this is from—she was born in August—so from August, September. . . . August, of course, she was born the day the war ended, fourteenth or fifteenth or sixteenth, somewhere around there.
- WN: In August?
- JN: Yeah.

MK: August '45.

WN: Nineteen forty-five.

JN: Yeah. And we left the camp in November. So between August, September, October—for three months. She was—you know, we were in camp, and she grew up for three months in the care of that family. When November came, I guess my mother got well enough so my mother, my kid sister, one brother—the oldest brother and my dad are gone. So now there's four of us, counting my kid sister. So we get on the ship in November to go back to Hawai'i.

WN: Can you explain the circumstances of your father and Jitsuo going back to Japan? Do you know why, that time they went?

JN: It had to do with this no-no camp thing. You know, they were signing no, noes, and they were most going to go back to Japan as far as I knew. So they then—sometimes I use the words “picked up”—they were then picked up and they went to Santa Fe to go back to Japan. I think while they were in Santa Fe, the war ended. I think then my dad decided, my older brother had to go back to Japan, even though the war ended, to find the rest of the family. Because, as I said, my grandparents, my two brothers, and my two ...

WN: Tomiko, Sumiko, William, Henry, and your grandparents.

JN: Yeah. They're there, right? So he said, “You got to go back to Japan,” from what I understand. So he goes, he's like sixteen, seventeen, he renounces his citizenship. (Tones in background.) He gets it back. He was too young. [Father] sends him back and he goes on this boat and they go to Indonesia somewhere. He had a tough time, anyway. And my father decides he's going to back to Hawai'i to put together his business and everything.

WN: I see. So your father never went back to Japan?

JN: No.

WN: Just Jitsuo went?

JN: Yeah. And somewhere, so we went back to Hawai'i, but not together. No, in fact, going home separately. We ended up back in that white house. Then he went back into business.

WN: Your father?

JN: Yeah. The story I heard was, he came back, the war ended, get lot of army barracks that had to be torn down. He goes in as a contractor, tears down the barracks, takes the used lumber. Right after the war, there's no lumber, right? He builds houses with this used lumber. Can you imagine the quality of the houses? (WN laughs.) So he builds his houses and there's no housing, right? This is after the war. He sells his houses and everything. Within, I think, four or five years, he sells everything out. No, I'm sorry. Before then, he gave up everything. He stopped his business. He had this lease over this whole place from Bishop Estate. He sold that. He stopped his business. Then from Wai'alae, we moved to Pālolo. I remember living in Pālolo. My mother died about a year after we got back.

Then he remarried. I still remember her. She was bad news. But the best thing that happened to me anyway, was when my stepmother said, “I can't stand those three boys.” This is his sons. Bill and Henry came back and I was there. She said, “I can't have those kids at home.” She had a son my age and we beat him up. That poor guy. He was kind of a weakling, so we beat him up. But she says, “Those three boys, get 'em out of the house.” So my father had no place to send us other than MPI [Mid-Pacific Institute]. If I didn't go MPI, I have no doubt I wouldn't have gone to college. If I'd gone to Kaimukī, where I was, Liliu'okalani and Kaimukī, I wouldn't have gone. I'd be a truck driver. I'd

- be doing construction work like my dad did. But the best thing that happened to me was, he threw us all into MPI.
- WN: So when you came back, you went to Liliu'okalani School, seventh grade. You went to Kaimukī Intermediate, eighth and ninth grade.
- JN: Yes. Eighth and ninth. Yeah.
- WN: When you mother died in '46, your father remarries. So who got sent to Mid-Pac? You. . . .
- JN: William and Henry.
- WN: William and Henry, okay. What about Bert?
- JN: He and my father gets into a dispute. My brother Bert, he's on his own. Then my father said, "You got to do this. You got to do that." He tells my father, "F-you." He joins the army. "The hell with you."
- MK: Oh!
- JN: He goes into the army.
- WN: So when you say that if you had not gone to Mid-Pacific, you wouldn't have gone to college, why is that? Was it a good education for you?
- JN: Yeah, because one is, my dad, of course, third-grade Japanese education, no English. There was nothing in our family telling us, "Hey, go to college. Education is important." My father could care less. He's third-grade education. I think, basically, he said, "Don't go to school. You don't need that. All you have to do is use your head" that kind of stuff. So I think if I didn't go to MPI, Mid-Pac, I probably would not have gone to college. I probably would have ended up maybe into construction. When you go to MPI, of course, you don't even think about it, but they expect you go to UH [University of Hawai'i]. One brother, of course, gets kicked out. But Bill and I graduate from MPI. They had to drop back a year because of problems in English. They dropped back. So Bill graduated in 1950, he then went to college on the Mainland. I graduated in '51, went to UH two years.
- Then, again, by luck, I'm living with my sister Sumiko, Sumi, and my brother-in-law. My brother-in-law, in 1953, decides, oh, he's going to go get his master's at the University of Chicago. So I have to go. Two years, I'm going to UH. By the way, I don't go to classes. (MK chuckles.) I don't study. I don't have books and I don't study. I'm going around with guys who don't go to college. In fact, I sleep over at their place. So after we're going to move. So the best thing happened to me, again, was by luck. I'm getting away from all the guys I was hanging around with. So we went back. I still remember, though, UH. For me to transfer to University of Illinois—I was flunking; I was taking Latin. What made me take Latin, I don't know. But there was this kindly *haole* woman who was teaching Latin. I went to her and I told her, "You got to let me drop out so that I don't get an *F* from you so that I can transfer without my *F* in Latin." She let me. She said okay. That was the only way I was able to transfer to University of Illinois. Otherwise, I wouldn't have made it.
- WN: You transferred to University of Illinois and you got your bachelor's in economics.
- JN: Yeah. Once I got to Illinois and once I got away from Hawai'i, somehow, all of a sudden, I changed and I decided I'm going to study. I don't know what happened. I can't explain it, what made me. For the first time—even at MPI I never studied. I did only what I had to, to get through with *C-minus*. Then I decided—I don't know what made me—I decided I'm going to start studying. So I practically got—I think I got straight A's when I was in my last two years at Illinois. Because I started studying for the first time in my life. Then I got out. I majored in economics after I talked to other people. I wanted to



major in history or philosophy, but they said, “Be practical. What are you going to do with that?”

(Laughter)

I tell, “Okay, okay, okay.”

“How about economics?”

I said, “Well, that’s better than the other two,” so I took economics.

Graduated, and I started law school there. That year, by luck—again, for me, by luck—there was a transformation of a whole bunch of new, young law professors that came on to the University of Illinois. And they were good. Really were inspirational. Really. They made me want to study. I did very well in my first year of law school. By this time, though, my whole family is in Chicago. I decided, yeah, I think I want to go to Chicago. I’m a getting little tired, I think, of school. I go to Chicago; I transfer to Northwestern. All my family’s there. All my sisters and my brothers and everybody is there. So I go one semester and I run out of gas. In fact, again, I made good grades, but I ran out of gas.

So I said I’m going to take a break. I’m going to volunteer for the draft. So for two years. I went to Fort Riley, Kansas. Thinking, hoping, that I’m going to be sent to the Far East or Europe, right? I go basic training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. They send me to Fort Riley, Kansas, and I’m stuck there for two years. (Chuckles) I don’t go anywhere. But in a way, maybe that was for the best because I went there and did nothing. Blank. Empty-minded. I did nothing. I didn’t do any thinking. It was like I needed that two-years break.

WN: Mmm. Plus this is peacetime, too.

JN: Oh, yeah. I wouldn’t have volunteered for the draft if it was wartime.

(Laughter)

WN: Right, right, this is true. This is post-Korean War.

JN: Yeah. Right, right. It was on purpose that I went in when there was no war. So in between there, while I’m still in the army, I got married. There was a girl from Hawai’i who came up. She’s something else. She’s born and raised in Kalihi, went to Farrington, and never went to college. But anyway, she raised my two kids. That’s incredible.

Anyway, I go back to Los Angeles and we get married in Los Angeles. So after I get out, I transfer to UCLA Law School. I had to do some bargaining to get there because I already had a year and a half of law school. And they said, “No, no, no. You go back to Northwestern. Go back to Illinois and get your degree there. You can finish up your last year.” See, that doesn’t make sense for me to go back. I don’t want to go back. I said, “How about if I go two years?” They said, “You go two years, we’ll give you” what do you call. So I went. I think I’m the first Asian to graduate from that law school.

WN: UCLA?

JN: Yeah. Law School. Somebody said I may have been the first Asian to graduate from. . . . No, that’s not true. I was the first Asian to be hired by the *haole* law firm. That’s right.

WN: Yeah. I would imagine there would be other Asian Americans who went to UCLA Law School.

JN: Yeah, not only that. The guy I became a partner with, he went to. . . . He was something. This guy named Jun Mori. He was born and raised in San Francisco but went to Japan before the war. His father went back to Japan. He graduated from Waseda. Came back to America because he’s an American citizen, goes to SC Law School, and he practices law.

He's fluent in Japanese. His English is immaculate. You don't find from Hawai'i—got Hawaiian accent. This guy, he has a command of language, somehow. But anyway, he's the guy I became a partner with later after my time with that *haole* law firm.

WN: What was the name of this law firm?

JN: Which one? With Jun Mori?

MK: No, the *haole* one. (Chuckles)

WN: The *haole* law firm.

JN: Finch. . . .

WN: Is this the one with Finch?

JN: Robert Finch. He was the guy, as I said, he ran Nixon's campaign in 1960 when he lost to Kennedy. So he came back. Robert Finch. Basically, they had a law firm in Inglewood, California. But when he came back, he opened up his own office in downtown Los Angeles. So when I graduated in 1960, I went. . . . Why I went there for an interview, I have no idea. But somebody from UCLA Law School must have sent me. I presume they had. My understanding was, I was the first Asian to be hired by a *haole* law firm, but I'm not quite sure. But anyway, I became. . . . Bob Finch is somebody to this day I admire. Even then, I was there when this guy Bob Haldeman and who's the other guy?

WN: John Ehrlichman.

JN: Ehrlichman. They used to come to the office. I met both of them. I also met Mrs. Nixon.

WN: Pat Nixon?

JN: Yeah. For some reason, I remember because she came up and told me, "Oh, Jim, did you pass the bar?" Anyway.

WN: She had a good memory.

JN: Yeah. She really. I guess being a politician's wife, that's her job, right?

I still remember. I was in this waiting room, waiting for him [Rob Finch], and I look up, there's pictures. Get Eisenhower's picture. Nixon's picture. It says, "To Bob, Thanks a lot. Ike" and "Thanks a lot. Dick." So I'm looking, then I say, "I'm a liberal leftwing Democrat, pretty close to being a Communist." And I'm thinking, "*Chee*, it occurs to me like I'm in the wrong place."

(Laughter)

So I go in for the interview. He's only like thirty-five, forty, himself, now. He's young kid yet. He's young. But I walk in, I tell him, "Mr. Finch, I have to tell you that my background is I'm leftwing liberal and what do you call."

He tells me, "We don't need politicians here. We need people to do law work, so you're hired."

So, I said, "Thank you very much." So I'm hired. I don't do any legal work. (Chuckles) The two years I was with him, I did all political work basically. Almost no law.

WN: Like what? What kind of work did you do?

JN: I went down to Watts. One of the things he sent me was, he sent me down to the black community. Already by this time, 1960, he saw—this is before the riots, now. Riots were in 1963?

WN: Around there. Sixty-four, '65, yeah.

JN: This is before the riots [that occurred in 1965], but he saw that the blacks, the minority groups, was going to be an issue in political campaigns. Why he had that vision, I don't know. But they had lost in 1960. And I'm sure he hired me only because of that. Then so he told me, "Well, you're going to practice law." But I never did actually. I remember going to meetings. I remember going to Watts. There was another black guy in the office. Guy named Norm Hodges. What happened, after the Watts riots, there was a whole bunch of these young blacks who did well and got out of Watts. Now, they were wanting to come back into Watts and to help other kids to come out. I was in that group of guys. I was the only Asian. All blacks basically.

MK: That was during the time you were working for Mr. Finch in the law office?

JN: Yeah. I don't have it with me, but I still have a card. He became the lieutenant governor of California. Reagan ran for governor, he ran for. . . . They ran independently, by the way, in California. So he ran for lieutenant governor. He became lieutenant governor. I'm down in Crenshaw with Jun Mori and Art Katayama. So I said, "I need to get business. I need a good card with your name on it."

He said, "Oh, yeah. I appoint you as representative of the lieutenant governor's office." There's an article of me. (Chuckles) I get a card with lieutenant—with address of that state building.

WN: Oh, yeah, right.

JN: ... of my being with the lieutenant governor.

WN: This says you became an assistant to the lieutenant governor after you left the law firm of Robert Finch. So this is when you moved over to Jun Mori's firm?

JN: Yeah. Right.

WN: So while you were with Jun Mori, you also became the assistant to the lieutenant governor.

JN: The lieutenant governor has an office actually in LA, in the state building. So that's the address I had, also.

MK: And Lieutenant Governor Finch had known you previously when you first worked ...

JN: For him.

MK: But when you were serving as his representative, you were representing Finch as he was serving as lieutenant governor.

JN: Correct.

MK: Okay. So your association with him was two different times, yeah?

JN: Yes.

MK: And two different capacities?

JN: Yes.

- WN: I see. So Finch was Reagan's lieutenant governor? When Reagan was governor, he was lieutenant governor?
- JN: Yes.
- WN: Okay, I see. Very interesting.
- MK: Oh, okay. Gee, and could they have sent someone else to be the representative or was your ethnicity something that worked well for them? You were not black, you're not white. How did your ethnicity work in this kind of situation?
- JN: I think, basically, all he did was do me a favor, giving me these cards. I didn't do anything. Every so often, I'd go to some kind of event and I'll sit in with a whole bunch of people I didn't know or anything. I don't recall doing anything, actually. But it helped when we'd try to get clients in J-Town to get a card that says, you know, passing it around, politically going around saying I'm a representative of the lieutenant governor's office.
- WN: Yeah, must have helped the law firm.
- JN: Yeah, it carried some weight around. So I just wanted to make sure the people in J-Town, Los Angeles, knew about it.
- MK: Because you're a Japanese American from Hawai'i, not Japanese American from West Coast, did it make a difference that you, too, went through the World War II camp experience? Is that something you ever shared with any of the J-Town clients? Did they know that. . . .
- JN: Whether or not I was in the internment camp?
- MK: Yeah.
- JN: I don't think that came up.
- MK: That never came up?
- JN: No. But I think in many ways, it probably rubbed a lot of people the wrong way, too.
- MK: Oh.
- JN: For me, for somebody from Hawai'i to be the lieutenant governor's representative instead of a *kotonk* kind of threw things off because again it kind of showed the *kotonk* people were not as aggressive as Hawai'i people. I think Hawai'i had an attitude; they grew up in a plurality. We grew up in Hawai'i. The *kotonks* had a different kind of an attitude, I think, toward the *haoles*. They're more laid-back and they were kind of more afraid to be assertive and ask for things, grab things. I kind of had that feeling. It may be only because of that a Hawai'i person would become a lieutenant governor's representative, rather than a *kotonk* who would be too embarrassed to find out if he could become one. I don't know. That's the kind of gut reaction that I have.
- WN: I have one question about the meetings that you had concerning Watts with the representatives from Watts. In essence, you were like the liaison or you represented the law office of Robert Finch, right, at that time. I know this is before the riots. What kinds of issues came up in these kind of discussions? Do you remember?
- JN: Not really. (Chuckles)
- WN: Did you detect any kind of tension or animosity or anything like that?
- JN: No.

WN: Oh, okay.

JN: They probably looked at me as being kind of strange. They probably never really seen close up, an Asian. In fact, my guess is, once they found out I was from Hawai'i, they probably thought I was Hawaiian. You know, there were quick connections to Hawaiian rather than to the Japanese.

WN: Okay. You had two daughters. They were both born in LA.

JN: Yeah.

WN: Then in 1969 you moved back to Hawai'i for good. Why did you do that?

JN: Because frankly—sometimes I have difficulty saying this, but I didn't want them to grow up like the *kotonks* were. I didn't want them to be looking up to the *haoles* all the time. I look back and I'm thinking it must have been hard to grow up where you're a member of such a minute minority. You go into an office and they look at you: Who are you? I got some of that feeling when I got out of UCLA Law School with, as far as I'm concerned, good grades. I walk into—like a dumb guy—*haole* law firms asking for a job and nobody does that. *Kotonks* don't do that. I didn't know any better. I thought, what the hell, I'm going to ask for a job, right? I got the grades, what do you mean? One guy, I still remember, there was one big-firm guy who interviewed me. He must have been amused that I would come and ask for a job. Because I remember one of the things he said—afterwards, I thought about it—one of the things he said was, "You know, my yardman is Japanese." It stuck in my mind and I'm thinking, "Gee, I should have punched that *haole* in the mouth." (Chuckles) But it's that attitude coming from this, going into this *haole* law firm. At that time, it wasn't—you just didn't hire. For one thing, you didn't have any Asians coming in to be interviewed, right? So I'm sure he didn't know what the hell to do with me.

WN: So you never got the job there?

JN: (Chuckles) No. No, I think he wanted to see if I could do yard work.

MK: But Finch didn't have that problem with you, yeah?

JN: Finch was different because he was a politician. He saw race as becoming an issue, as a political issue, as a social issue. That's why I always looked up to and admired Bob Finch. He was cut out by Bob Haldeman and Ehrlichman. They pushed him out, they cut him off. Bob helped these guys come up with Nixon. What they did was, they turned around, and they cut him off.

WN: So he wasn't associated with Nixon like when he ran for president in '68 or anything like that?

JN: Sixty-eight? Oh, he still was. But he didn't have that.

WN: But not as ...

JN: The reason I remember, I came back in '69. Sixty-eight, Bob Finch said, "I'll get you a job in the White House. You'll be the first Asian in the White House." By that time, I decided I'm taking my kids home. So I turned it down and I recommended another Asian guy. I think he took the job. That guy was the first Asian in the White House. But I always as I said, I always looked up to him. He was somebody. He wasn't a talkative guy. He's kind of reserved kind of a guy. But nothing but admiration for him. And being so young, he was so mature.

MK: Yeah, until you said he was thirty-five, forty, I was, in my mind, envisioning someone much older.

JN: No, he was still very young.

- MK: I'm also wondering, how come after you got your UCLA law degree, how come you didn't come home right away to see if you could get a job here with one of the local law firms?
- JN: I guess, one, I didn't know anybody here in Hawai'i at all. I had no connections to Hawai'i. In fact, I think in my mindset already, I probably thought I had to stay there, although I wanted to come back. I mean, my heart was—I wanted to raise my kids here. But I probably felt as a practical matter that I have to stay on the Mainland to work. But by luck, there was a guy, oh, he went to Illinois, first year, with me. But this guy Herb Ikazaki was a CPA, then became an attorney. In fact, I got him to work with us at Mori and Katayama. He [Arthur Katayama] and Jun Mori got into a battle, so he took off. While I was still there, ultimately he went back to Hawai'i, Herb did. He was a CPA/attorney. Then he got in with a group of guys here. He called me back. He says, "Hey, come back." This '69. As I said, I was thinking of going to the Mainland, probably going to Washington D.C. at that time. Then he told me, "Come on back." With my kids, that's the main thing I wanted to do.
- MK: Good.
- WN: So from '69 until when did you retire?
- JN: I forgot. Four or five years ago.
- WN: Okay. And you were with Ikazaki all this time?
- JN: Well, actually, Ikazaki left early on. So I stayed on. Then one guy died and another guy retired. Pretty soon I was running the office, basically. So we had this law firm going. Then there was Nakano. Paul Devens, we got. We got Devens. Main reason, well, Paul, myself, then I hired a guy named Russ Saito. Saito is a CPA/attorney, too. He basically is the guy running the law firm now. But there's only few guys left already, so.
- WN: Maybe you can tell us what your two daughters have done and accomplished? I think this is ...
- JN: First thing, though, you have to remember is, I was never home, basically. I was not at home because I was always busy. My kids were raised by their mother. Their mother is from Farrington High School, never went to college. She's the mother. She still lives with my younger daughter. While we were on the Mainland, the two kids were born. When they were about two-and-a-half, three-and-a-half years old, 1969, I decided I want them to grow up in Hawai'i. So we came back to Hawai'i. I knew I was going to take a pay cut because Hawai'i, they don't pay as much, don't make as much. We came back and we struggled a little bit, but things worked out, luckily. They went to Punahou, frankly. I don't like to tell people that.
- (Laughter)
- WN: That's okay. Our president went to Punahou.
- JN: Yeah. I know.
- (Laughter)
- JN: But anyway. They went from kindergarten, first grade. They went to Punahou. They both finished there. But they were raised by their mother, as I said, who was a Farrington graduate. I was hardly at home. The younger daughter went to Stanford, undergraduate; came back here, went to medical school and became a pediatrician at Kaiser now. That's what she is. She has two kids. She's married and her husband, my son-in-law, is half Hawaiian. His mother is pure Hawaiian from Hana, Maui. His father is from upstate New York. Anyway, so my grandkids are one-quarter Hawaiian, one-quarter *haole*, and half Japanese.

My older daughter went to a small college called Carleton College in Minnesota, which I didn't know, but had a direct connection to Yale. So then from Carleton, she went to Yale for a master's and Ph.D. at Yale in anthropology. So she teaches at Chinese University of Hong Kong. In fact, she runs the department, whatever department there is there. I'm trying to get her back home. But I don't know if my daughter wants to come back now.

(Laughter)

WN: Okay, maybe it's about time to end this. (Laughs)

MK: But I just wanted to ask you, did you ever talk to your daughters about your wartime experience?

JN: I haven't told them anything actually. They don't know anything. They don't know who I am. So when I have copies, I'd like to have two copies of everything. I think I want to give. But I don't want them to get them until after I'm gone. I'll give it to them afterwards. This is not going to be published and everything?

WN: Eventually they are. Again, we'll work with you. You'll get to look at the transcript. You know what I mean? Whatever you say today is not necessarily going to be in it. You're going to have the final look through.

JN: Oh, okay. That's good.

WN: Thank you so much.

MK: Thank you so much, Mr. Nakano.

JN: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

# **Unspoken Memories:**

## **Oral Histories of Hawai‘i Internees at Jerome, Arkansas**

**Center for Oral History  
Social Science Research Institute  
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa**

**March 2014**